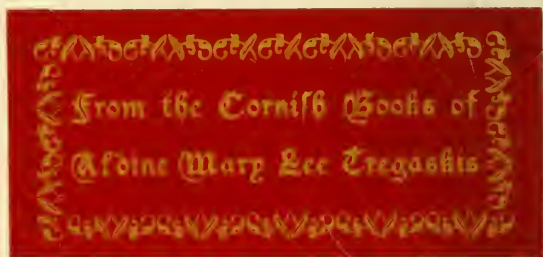




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OUR LITTLE TOWN

OUR LITTLE TOWN

AND OTHER CORNISH TALES AND FANCIES

BY

CHARLES LEE

AUTHOR OF

"THE WIDOW WOMAN," "PAUL CARAH, CORNISHMAN"
ETC.



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TO
ARTHUR CHAMPION PHILLIPS WILLYAMS
THESE STORIES OF HIS OWN PEOPLE

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OUR LITTLE TOWN

PENTICOST'S

BESSIE'S Tom, who is a travelled man and knows what he is talking about, is wont to declare that if he were to have a sudden access of fortune—ay, though it were thousands of pounds—he would never stir from Porthjulyan. Why should he, when Porthjulyan provides all that the heart of rational man can desire—affable neighbours, plenty of news going round all the while, and the fat of the land to live on? There is no beef like ours; killed at our doors, it goes into the pot fresh and fresh twice a week. If you have a mind to a sup of tea, or if your fancy dwells on a sup of brandy, our resources are equal to either occasion. Would you muse on the beauties of Nature? There are the rocks in the cove, declared by unprejudiced strangers to be the handsomest rocks they ever set eyes on. Are you for solacing your sight

with the achievements of Art? There is Wesley Chapel, universally admitted to be an architectural marvel; and not a house in the place but boasts of stately pictures, many of them painted off by hand. Would you indulge in a little dissipation? St. Kenna is only twelve miles off, and a brief four hours' journey by 'bus will set you down amidst the feverish gaieties of a market town, with its cattle-fairs, organ recitals, auction sales, and Salvation Army meetings. Naturally you wish to live to a good old age, that you may enjoy your fortune to the utmost. Bessie's Tom can name off-hand a dozen folk between Gov'ment Buildings and Sunny Corner who are well up in the eighties. And no wonder, when Porthjulyan can boast of so bountiful a supply of good, strong, healthy water. "There's nothing like water," declares Bessie's Tom; an ancient Greek has said the same. "Nothing like water," says Tom, and pauses, and adds reflectively, "Though I an't saying a word agin rum." Yes, as a place of residence our little town should commend itself to the wealthy leisured classes; and as for us poor working folk, why, we manage to get along tolerable well, thank'e, what with our crabbing,

and spiltering, and boltering, and trammelling, and teeling our little plats of land, and snaring a few rabbits now and again, and—this in your ear—maybe knocking over a pheasant or two at a particular time.

Physically and politically, all Porthjulyan is divided into two parts—the Town proper, and Gov'ment. Taking the letter U for the ground work of our survey, I would ask you to impart a slight outward slant to the two uprights, and to consider them as two steep roads running inland up two narrow valleys. Where the basal curve begins, there begins Porthjulyan on either side, the town to the left, Gov'ment to the right. A low cliff or spur of the hills divides the two parts, so that each is invisible to the other; but follow the road as it humps itself over this cliff, and from the midmost point you can obtain a comprehensive view of the whole place.

First turn seawards. You look down on the cove and its two beaches—the town beach with its serried array of boats, some forty in number, and ranging in size from the little skiffie-boat in which the farm boys and their maidens take their penn'orth of sea on summer evenings, to the two big black scine-

boats lying high and dry with their sterns poking out into the street; and the Gov'ment beach, with its solitary Gov'ment gig afloat at the foot of the Gov'ment slip—a spick and span fine lady in blue and white, decorously bobbing and curtseying all day to the indifferent rocks and the disdainful gulls. Wheel about with a half-turn to the right, and the town is before you, a long, narrowish street, curving gently down and away from you to the beach, where it twists sharp about and then straightens itself again for the climb up the valley; with houses set close on either side like partners in a country dance, and other houses scattered here and there on the slopes behind, like the old folks looking on. If it has been raining—and it generally has—the roofs will be shining like mirrors, and the road with its glittering puddles will look too precious to tread upon. Over the housetops there floats a delicate mist, which, for all its ethereal beauty, is not above hinting to you of certain substantial comforts.

Now turn about, and your eyes are dazzled with Gov'ment whitewash; first the white-washed boathouse with its whitewashed wall about it, then a whitewashed fence enclosing

the Gov'ment cabbages; above that, the chief officer's whitewashed villa, four-square and vigilant like its master; above that again the men's whitewashed quarters, crouched under the hilltop in the discreet attitude enjoined by official dignity and reserve—to wit, with their backs to the road and the town and the common folk thereof. A few cottages stand about in huddled groups, with the awe and influence of Gov'ment upon them; they have a timid air, one fancies, and have whitewashed their faces at least, if not their sides and backs. Over in the town, Porthjulyan despises white-wash as a vain and doubtful gloss on honest stone, and is stiff against whitewash, that mark of the Gov'ment beast, and has a text ready on its tongue that is hard upon the whited wall.

Further to describe Porthjulyan, and to differentiate it unmistakably from its neighbours, I would mention cats and fuchsias. At Pengower, to the west of us, the windows and walls are ablaze with geraniums, and white clouds of pigeons are ever gathering and scattering overhead; at Tregarry, to the east, the floral taste runs to Portugal laurels, and the chickens outnumber the humans by ten to

one ; while at Polgoose, up over the hill, pigs and begonias hold undisputed sway. But at Porthjulyan no household is complete without its fuchsia-bush on either side of the door—comely sentinels in green picked out with crimson and purple—and its sleek family of cats curled up on the slab beside the stewpot. An event without parallel elsewhere is of daily occurrence at Porthjulyan when the boats come in. As the first keel kisses the sand, cats, white, grey, tabby and tortoiseshell, appear from all quarters and scamper down to greet their masters. The sight of half a dozen big-booted men stumbling up the beach, each one preceded by a proud cat with heavenward-pointing tail, or by an abject cat that casts itself at intervals in paroxysms of grovelling affection before feet that have much ado to keep from treading on it, is not without its tender humour.

As for the fuchsias, their likes for size and multitudinous blossoming are not to be found in all the countryside. Porthjulyan takes pride in its fuchsias ; that is well enough ; but pride begets emulation, and emulation breeds envy, hatred, malice, and all manner of uncharitableness—ugly issue to father on

the lovely innocent flowers ; yet so it is. The tale is yet new of Tarbox and Pockets, how each boasted in the other's presence that his was the finest fuchsia in the town ; and how from boasting they descended to argument, and rose thence to hot words and revilings, and parted in anger. Late that night, Tarbox, with a steaming kettle in his hand, met Pockets, who fingered a sharp knife. They scowled and passed, each towards the other's dwelling. Two minutes later they met again, and this time each gave vent to a diabolical chuckle. When day dawned, the two finest fuchsias in Porthjulyan lay a-dying ; the one had been severed from its roots, and on the other boiling water had been poured. I tell you this in order to have done with it soon ; it is the darkest tale I have to relate of Porthjulyan.

Our civic life is naturally focused down beach. If you take the aforementioned seine-boats for your central point, and fetch a compass of some dozen yards about them, your circle will include all the vital organs of the town, with two notable exceptions ; the inn, which is discreetly and conveniently withdrawn and sequestered among trees beyond the village proper, so that he who is

for a modest glass is not to be distinguished from him who is for a quiet country stroll; and the chapel, which is judiciously located away in the opposite direction, in the Gov'ment regions, far enough off to isolate it from the week-day stress and stir, and, incidentally, to give us a fair chance of thoroughly airing our own best clothes and admiring other people's. But the beach itself, the shop, the post-office, the seat of honour, and Penticost's fall every one within our imaginary circle, and about them the life-blood of Porthjulyan ebbs and flows. The beach is as other beaches, the shop not unlike other shops, the post office calls for no special comment, and even on the seat of honour we need not dwell at present. It has its counterpart elsewhere, this fragment of amorphous wreckage, studded with insidious bolts and nails, set in the lewth of a wall facing south, and reserved by immemorial custom for the use of the grandf'ers. There they sit in the sun, their knees up, their sticks between their knees, their hands clasped on their sticks, their chins resting on their hands, their eyes blinking, their beards wagging, as they mumble true tales of ancient times. But Penticost's demands more than a passing notice.

Penticost's might aptly be described as the brain of Porthjulyan—the vital spot that our best blood goes to feed, the source from which our corporate, as distinguished from our individual, thought and action take their rise. In plain language, Penticost's is our shoemaker's shop, and the chief meeting-place of our men-folk.

You might pass it a dozen times and never notice it. A low, narrow door opening into cavernous darkness, and a small-paned, mud-splashed window with its sill scarcely transcending the level of the street—such is the unassuming outward aspect of Penticost's. Enter the door, stumble down three steps, knock your head against an unsuspected wall, twist to the left through another doorway, and you are in a dim cellar that may measure some eight feet by six. Before the window is a table strewn with miscellaneous cobbling tackle: nails, taps, sparables, lasts, scraps of leather, and the like. In front of the table sits Penticost himself on a folding stool; on the ground beside him lie various tools and requisites, hammers and heelblock to the right, lapstones, iron-foot and water-pail to the left; and behind him is a bench for the accommodation of

visitors. Penticost's knees are just clear of the table; the knees of the central occupant of the bench are in like manner just clear of the small of Penticost's back; and the bench itself is closely jammed against the wall. Vertically, the dimensions are just sufficient to accommodate our tallest member without compelling him to stoop; and here I must confess that we are not remarkable for our stature. Once, indeed, we had a tall man among us, a very giant; but an envious Gov'ment laid hands on him and made him policeman up to Churchtown; and we rejoiced to be rid of an incubus. He was a fool (or Gov'ment would never have coveted him), and a misfit into the bargain. We care not for an empty head that mocks us from absurd altitudes, bumping with witless arrogance against crossbeams and planchings that were adjusted with an eye to men of decent growth. He was always bumping his silly head, and the groan he invariably fetched was an insult to our inches. Gov'ment was welcome to him; and, to do him justice, he makes an excellent policeman—ornamental and not too clever, a capital bogey to frighten our children with, and a first-rate butt when we have a mind to string our shafts against

the powers that be. If you imagine further uses for him, you insult the soberest, most law-abiding folk in Cornwall. Crime, save in the matter of fuchsias, is unknown among us, and even Bessie's Tom, who is not above a drop of run-down, never gets properly drunk but once a year. That is when the Band of Hope holds its gala day here, with Polgoose brass band and a ninepenny tea in the school-room. Bessie's Tom always gets drunk then on principle, as he will explain to you—"to show I an't one of 'em."

To return to Penticost's. The quarters are snug, to be sure; and if you should happen to be passing the door on a wet winter's evening, when the Club, as we playfully style ourselves, is dispersing, and should see twenty able-bodied men emerging one after another, you would be apt to think of miracles, or of conjuring tricks at the least. The place is not always so crowded as that, or Penticost would never get any work done at all; but I doubt if he is ever alone in his shop for half an hour at a time from year's end to year's end.

If there's nobody else, Bessie's Tom is sure to be present. Bessie's Tom is lean and grey, his nose is the imperious eagle's, and his bleared

eyes have seen many wonders at Sunderland and Cardiff and Runcorn. A crafty man and a masterful, a thinker of agile wit, a subtle debater, it is he who presides over the club, guides its discussions, and sees that its rules are enforced. For we have our rules—printed ones too, or as near to print as our most expert calligraphist could make them. Tom himself drew them up, and they are nailed on the wall over against the door for all to see. Thus they run :

NO SWEARING NOR DAMMING.

NO RELIGEON EXCEPT PENTICOST HE CAN'T
HELP IT.

NO WIMEN ALOWD.

NOT MORE THAN FIVE TO SMOKE TO ONCE.
NO TAKING WAX-ENDS WITHIOUT PERMISSIAN.

Briefly commenting on these, I would ask you to admire the subtle distinction implied in the first of them. The second has been found necessary in order to prevent unseemly wrangles in a place that holds fervent Wesleyans, ardent Churchmen and fiery Bryanites in nearly equal proportions. The saving clause is a graceful concession to our host's weakness for garnishing his conversation with obscure and terrible texts from the minor

prophets. The third calls for no comment whatsoever. The fourth is a needful sanitary regulation, having regard to the exiguous dimensions of our quarters. Without the protection of the fifth, Penticost would soon be a ruined man, with wax-ends twopence apiece, and their superior fitness for binding fish-hooks and splicing knife-handles generally recognised.

Next to Bessie's Tom, the most assiduous frequenter of the club is James-over-to-shop. A man of substance and argument is James, and our best debater after Tom. He is Tom's inferior in mental agility, but otherwise they are well matched. Solemn, ponderous, manifold of chin, his least word seems to carry the weight of all his superfluity of flesh. A man of formulæ is James, and when we hear—"Now I'll give you an insight," or "I don't coincide with you there," or "That's very well: I an't saying nothing 'bout *that*," then we lean back and confidently await something worth listening to.

No session can be considered complete without Sam Jago, that silent humorist with the twinkling eye, whose few remarks, flavoured with an agreeable cynicism chiefly directed against women and coastguardsmen, supply the

indispensable dash of condiment to our conversational dish. For example—

“Jenny don’t care, so long as she get her man. Come Judgement Day, there she’ll be coocing after en through the fireworks.”

“Jenny’s never too old to know roguery, and Jacky’s never too old to be took in by en.”

“Fighting come by nature: there an’t a cheeld but can double his fist, soon’s he’s born.”

“Gov’ment? Give me four brass buttons and a pail o’ whitewash, and I’ll run Gov’ment myself.”

Beside Sam, for the sake of the contrast, I will set Jan Tripp, whose fatuous eloquence, if you analyse it, will be found to be the joint offspring of a slow mind and a voluble tongue—a revoluble tongue, if I may coin an apt word for the occasion. I will illustrate what I mean by a specimen of Jan courteously making conversation with a stranger over his garden gate of a moonlit evening.

“Fine night,” says the stranger casually. Jan fixes him with a pair of blinking blue eyes, and makes answer—

“Ess. Moon’s looking beautiful to-night—beautiful and bright she’s looking. ’Tis light enough of a night when there’s a moon. When

there an't no moon, then 'tis dark. But when there's a moon, then 'tis tolerable bright, you see."

The stranger assents, and innocently conceiving the subject to be exhausted, remarks that the night is also somewhat chilly. But Jan is nothing if not thorough; so far from having emptied the theme, he is only just beginning to discern its conversational possibilities. He continues blandly—

"Ess. Very different when there edn' no moon; then 'tis dark, sure enough. When there's a nice bright moon, then you can see your way about, b'lieve. But these dark nights, they'm terrible dark, I assure 'e. Sometimes you couldn' see nothing, these dark nights when there edn' no moon."

The desperate stranger flies for relief to the fishing prospects. In vain. Jan listens politely to the irrelevant interruption, and resumes with unabated enthusiasm—

"No. Don't know what we should do if there wadn' no moon to give us light sometimes of a night. 'Tis the nature of nights to be dark, you see; and when 'tis dark, then 'tidn' easy to find your way about. There an't no sun, night-time, if you'll notice; so we'm mostly dependent on the moon. She don't

shine by day, the moon don't, not being wanted, you see, because of the sun. But I don't know what we should do, night-time, if 'twadn' for the moon. When there an't no moon—'tis so sometimes—then 'tis terrible dark in these parts, I can tell 'e."

Then the stranger departs abruptly, his brain in a whirl, and Jan, still full of his subject, turns indoors to discourse with his wife at more adequate length on the beauty and utility of the moon.

Without wearying you with a list of our obscurer members, I have a special reason for mentioning those involuntary contributors to the gaiety of our club, Orlando Chynoweth and Archelaus Trudgeon. Orlando is a stuttering simpleton, and there is humour for you ready made. Archelaus, that roaring blade, is all but stone deaf. When other amusements fail, we invent and retail scandalous stories about him, he sitting in our midst and imploring us to make him a partaker of the joke. Or we egg him and Orlando on to quarrel, and since wrath reduces Orlando's speech to an incoherent babble, and swells Archelaus's to a cannonade that threatens the window-panes, you can imagine our exquisite enjoyment.

With these, and a sprinkling of idle juniors congenially occupied in "helping Uncle Antony to kill dead mice," as the phrase goes, the permanent session at Penticost's is fairly complete. It is not until dark that the place becomes crowded, though most who pass by look in for a moment, "to see what it is," as we say.

I have left Penticost himself to the last. He is an inoffensive little man, sallow-cheeked, gross of body, and of a simple and pious habit of mind. In his own shop he is nobody—the common butt of our wits, the victim of countless practical jokes, his impotent wrath dissolving into tears as soon as it bursts. But we are all fond of Penticost, and in one respect he compels our admiration. He has a more than feminine scent for news. His little black eyes are as sharp as a robin's; his ears can only have been fashioned so big and outstanding for one purpose; his very mouth is mostly ajar to catch what it may. Moreover, his memory is incredibly exact and capacious. He can tell you off-hand who is second cousin to whom; no mean feat, with an intricate net of cross-relationships tangling us all up in a way that would make the most expert of genealogists tear his hair.

He knows to a day how long Maria, the bake-house woman, has worn that imitation sealskin jacket of which she is so inordinately proud, and remembers where she bought it and what she paid for it better than Maria herself. Maria and her kind love him not. He can repeat you true stories of twenty years back with all those minute details of speech and gesture, without which, as we consider, no true story is worth the telling. As he sits and hammers, at the faintest sound of wheels or footsteps in the street, his eyes go up, his ears (I would swear) shoot forward, his mouth drops wide open, and—small as that window is, and thickly as the dust and mud obscure it—in a flash all that is to be known of the passer-by is known to Penticost. He nods his head sharply.

“Who’s that, Penticost?” says somebody.

“Can’t mind his name for the minute,” says Penticost, hammering away. “But he’s own brother to Josiah Johns that married our Nancy’s Geraldine. Lives up to Poltriggan. Helps the photographer there, carr’ing parcels and oiling the machine and making faces at the babies to keep them quiet while they’m being took. Wears a pipe and a drum-hat Sundays, and he’s courting the zecond parlour-maid up

to Squire Vivian's. I see he've got a kind of a flat parcel in his hand. Seeming to me, that'll be the pickshers Nancy had took last week of her youngest maid, the one that's been put out to sarvice up to St. Kenna. Stopped to Poltriggan 'pon the way, they did, and had her took in three divisions. Seven shilling for the dozen, so I'm towld; and who's going to pay for 'em I don't know. Nancy's owing two pound for rent this very day, bezide I don't know how much over to shop for flour and sugar. She take fower lumps, Nancy do. But that's who the man is, and he's subjeck to fits bezide. When you see one coming on, ask him the time o' day, sharp, and you'll put him off. Ess—and now I mind the name av 'um. 'Tis Benedictus—same as his father, owld Benedictus Johns over to Port Oliver; and he was a thatcher by trade, and kept tame hedgy-boars for his divarsion, and died October thirteen last year. A little man 'a was, and never give no trouble to nobody when alive; but after they'd fitted his coffin he swelled up tremenjous, so they tell me—took three men to get en in, two to shove en down, and one to shut home the cover and sit upon it, like a porkmantle. Ess, that's the man; that's av 'um. Got a smart new

pilot-cap up to 'm, so I see, and a little dinky can with a brass top to 'n, that his zecond parlour-maid give him last Christmas; but the sole of his left boot's nearly off, so he needn' be proud. Churlie Jackson!"—Penticost's voice suddenly rises from narrative pitch to the shrill tones of protesting wrath—"Churlie Jackson, if you put codgy-wax on my stool agin, I'll turn 'e out o' my shop and never leave 'e come in no more! Aw! where's my hammer? Where's it to? Arthur Tripp, I condemn 'e for taking my hammer! There 'tis!"—the little man is weeping already—"there 'tis; I ben't left to arn a bit o' bread in my own shop! Gie me that hammer!" He seizes another hammer and flourishes it. "Show your pluck, then! Put forth your hand and leave me hit en! No—you don't dare! You haven' got no pluck, no more 'n a screw-mouse. You can tease a quiet old man in his own shop, sticking him to his own seat with his own codgy-wax, but you haven' got no pluck to face en after that. Aw, the Book's harder 'pon 'e than what Penticost is! 'He shall break in pieces the oppressor,' it say; and when the Book say a thing, it mean it, I can tell 'e. 'Gospel truth'—heard tell o' that, have 'e? 'Gospel truth,' and 'break in

pieces the oppressor'—put they two together, and where 'm you to? Scat all to lerrups, the lot av 'e! Ay, laugh away, if you've a mind to. The Black Man's laughing behind 'e. Gie me that hammer!"

Such, for our instruction and entertainment, is Penticost, dear soul. Can you wonder that we honour him so persistently with our company, even when he would much prefer our room?

A QUESTION OF TASTE

CASTING about me for means to bring you to a closer acquaintance with our little town, and wishing particularly to give you an insight below the material surface of things into the deep workings of our minds, I can think of no better plan than to submit to you a faithful report of the great debate that was held at Penticost's last winter between Bessie's Tom and James-over-to-shop. When our two subtlest dialecticians join issue, we are always sure of an intellectual treat; but on this occasion they excelled themselves. We still speak of that debate as the most brilliant in the annals of our club. Such a feast of stateliest and most regal argument was never dished up to us before or since; never at a single haul were so many pearls of wit and wisdom dredged out of the fathomless and unquiet deeps of controversy.

You may object that the subject or main

thesis was trivial even to foolishness—unworthy, therefore, of the elaborate treatment it received. I admit the fact, and dispute the deduction. With us (and surely we are right), the subject counts for less than nothing. Dearly loving an argument, we show our affection by loving it as it should be loved, for its own sake, without regard to its worth or substance. We will dispute you as readily, as keenly, ay, and as profitably, on the dimensions of a prize cabbage as on the fate of empires. Moreover, we fully recognise, as many fail to do, that logic, pretty sport though it be, is only sport after all, and must not be allowed to interfere with a man's cherished convictions. We may at times be defeated in the wordy fray, but we never fail to retire in good order with all the honours of war, armed at every point as when we entered the lists. For what is man, I ask, but a bundle of opinions? Some of them may be worthless, mere rotten sticks, so to speak; but for all that they are a part of his individuality, and therefore deserve to be fostered and respected. Pull out one single stick, though it be the rottenest of all, and your bundle is apt to fall to pieces at the first shake. So what we say we adhere to, like limpets to a rock. Indeed,

defeat only rouses our pride and confirms our stubbornness; drubbed, we clench our teeth and sit the closer.

The lowly origin of the great debate must be sought for among the apples and onions of Penticost's pasty. Living up at Churchtown, two miles away, Penticost brings his dinner with him, and eats it as a rule in the one half-hour of the day when his shop is empty, between a quarter past twelve and a quarter to one. But on this occasion a school tea was toward, and no sooner had he taken down his shutters than he was well-nigh buried in an avalanche of juvenile foot-gear. A crowd of small boys rushed in, pulled off their boots, thrust them into Penticost's hands, and announced their inflexible determination (backed by maternal authority) of waiting on the spot till the necessary repairs were executed. Bessie's Tom, arriving at his usual hour, started back aghast from a scene of unparalleled riot and disorder. On the floor two urchins rolled in the throes of a dispute as to which had first call on Penticost's services; half a dozen stood on the bench, shrilly cheering the combatants; while that anointed limb, John Charles Peter, perched cross-legged on a corner of the table, was

gravely lecturing Penticost on his notorious idleness and incapacity. Penticost himself, white with wrath, was vainly striving to quell the tumult with fulminations borrowed from the prophet Joel.

Tom's prompt and vigorous action restored something like order, but there was no rest for Penticost that morning, or that afternoon either. It was growing dark when, with the departure of the last small boy to test the temper of his rehabilitated toe-caps against the nearest stone wall, Penticost heaved a sigh of relief, cast from him iron foot and heel-block, threw his coat over his shoulders, and produced knife, fork, and pasty. By that time James-over-to-shop, Sam Jago, and a few others had dropped in. With meditative eyes we watched Penticost as he shovelled away with knife and fork alternately; and when we began to talk, our discourse naturally turned on the mysteries of diet and digestion. We discussed pigs and their filthy ways, and agreed that wonder-working Nature did nothing more marvellous than when through porcine agency she transformed disgusting offal into tasty bacon. We thought that, theoretically speaking, horseflesh was a far more suitable article of human diet,

the horse being a clean feeder ; but we doubted whether all the oil-cake in the world would produce in the friend of man that unique streakiness to which bacon chiefly owes its vogue.

Then James-over-to-shop propounded a hypothesis. Suppose, said James, that he, or Bessie's Tom, or any other man in the place, were to go to a town, say to St. Kenna, and, feeling hungry, as weak mortals must at times, were to enter an eating-house—Thomas's, as it might be, or Simons's (he wasn't particular as to which, and desired to avoid all appearance of favouritism)—and were to sit down, stretch his legs, rap on the table, and call aloud for rabbit-pie, or, for the sake of argument, hare-pie. Very well. Having supposed all this, suppose in addition that Thomas, or Simons, or one of their underlings, were to set before him (James) or Bessie's Tom, or whoever it was, a pie made of rabbit—or of hare, as the case might be—and also a pie, of identical appearance, containing a cat, properly skinned and cut up, and the tell-tale claws removed. Then, in James's opinion, if you, being ignorant which was which, were to taste both pies, that is to say both the rabbit-pie—or, to

allow for contingencies, the hare-pie—and the cat-pie, you would be totally incapable of distinguishing between the cat-pie and the hare-pie, or, not to limit the argument too strictly, the rabbit-pie. “And that shows,” he concluded, “that the tongue of man is as water, and they that put their trust in it shall be confounded.”

The clear enunciation of a hypothesis is no easy matter; its nebulous, intangible nature is apt to elude all but the firmest handling. But we all felt that James had succeeded to admiration; his statement was lucid and complete, and the quasi-Scriptural phrasing of the conclusion gave weight and dignity to the whole. It was felt that this was no matter for bungling novices to tackle, and all eyes were turned on Bessie's Tom. Tom needed no invitation. He snatched up the cudgel and whirled it in his well-known vigorous fashion.

What was all this talk? Foolishness. James's talk was the plumpest foolishness ever spit out of a Christian mouth. These were strong words, but Tom was ready to make them good. What was the pivot on which James's argument turned? Cat-pie. What did

James mean by cat-pie? In his own words, a pie made of cat. What was a cat? Was it a rabbit? Certainly not. Or a hare? Far from it. Well and good. Now, what were our tongues given us for? Why, for tasting vittles, and for conducting rational arguments. What was James doing? At once denying the first use and stultifying the second by his foolish talk, with no more value in it than there was in a heap of straw. What did this prove? That James, take him all in all, was little better than an Infidel.

We drew breath and looked at James. The indictment was severe. Had he an answer? He had.

First, with a pitying smile, he insinuated that Tom had altogether failed to grasp the point of his argument. Then, as a concession to Tom's weak intellect, he restated his hypothesis, with careful amplifications. "And now," he continued, "I'll give you an insight. When I was on the coasting trade, our vessel lay alongside of a Frenchman in Swansea harbour. Our cap'n and the French cap'n got brave and friendly, pallyvouzing away, till one day Frenchy up and ask our cap'n to step aboard and take denner with him. Down

cabin they go, and had a rare good come-out. One dish took our cap'n's fancy p'tic'lar, and 'a laid into en something tremenjous. Come to come on deck—'How you like your denner?' says Frenchy. 'Toler'ble well,' says our cap'n, 'p'tic'lar that last dish. A tasty consarn, sure 'nough,' says he. Then the French cap'n grin like a cloamen cat. 'You know vat you vas eating ven you eat that dish?' he say. 'I do not,' says our cap'n. 'Twas tasty, and I could ha' done with some more, but what 'a was I couldn' tell for my life. What was it now?' says our cap'n. 'Snails,' says Frenchy; and 'pon that, our cap'n up with his fist and knack that Frenchman down. Ess, knacked that Frenchman down, 'a did, before 'a could say 'Morbloo.' Cost en five pound up to police-court next day; five pound that dish o' snails cost en, so sure's I'm a-setting here. What d'ye say to that?" concluded James, turning abruptly on Tom.

"What do I say to that?" retorted Tom. "I say this to that. First I say, knocking a man down edn' no argyment 'tall; and knocking a man down that have just treated 'e to a denner edn' nothing but tejousness, snails or none. Next I say, snails an't cats. Offer a

cat a cabbage-leaf—that'll tell 'e. A snail's a snail, but a cat's a cat. I condemn 'e for dragging snails in by the ears where they an't wanted, and so muddling things up. Your argyment was cats, wadn'a?—cats and hares and such foolishness. Well then, how don't 'e stick to your argyment? Stick to your cats, if so be cats is your argyment; stick to your cats, my dear, and I'll follow 'e so fur's I can."

"And that edn' fur!" exclaimed his opponent. "You'm on the wrong tack agin. I was giving 'e an insight, didn' I say so? Insight and argyment, they'm two deffrant things, b'lieve; if you'd got any letrature 'tall, you'd know that. My argyment edn' snails, nor 'tedn' cats; my argyment's the tongue of man, and they that put their trust in it shall be confounded."

"You'm right there, sure 'nough," interjected Tom with a chuckle; but James disdained to grapple with the wilful misunderstanding.

"My snails and cats," he continued, "they'm nothing but illoosions—that's what they are: illoosions, or parables, if you've a mind to call 'em so. They don't tetch my argyment. My argyment stand on his own little feet; you may heave all the cats in the town at en, and

all the snails bezide, but you won't upshot my little argyment—not one iotto av 'um."

"Iotto?" Tom corrected James. "Iotum you do mane. Iotum's the word, if you must go cutting up. If you'd got any letrature 'tall, you'd know that." (A neat thrust; we marked it with our applause.) "And if your argyment edn' cats nor yet snails, better-fit you pitch en agin, and leave they out of it."

So saying, Bessie's Tom leaned back and inspected his finger-nails one by one. Since Tom went on the Provident Club and became a gentleman of leisure, his finger-nails have become a chief object of his care and attention, and by diligently paring and polishing he has brought them to such a state of perfection that you would never guess him to have done a day's work in his life. Pink, glistening, almond-shaped, they would do credit to any fine lady. Bessie's Tom inspected his finger-nails—the act is known to have a particularly irritating effect on his horny-handed opponents—and the rest of us waited in silence, while James-over-to-shop pondered deeply.

Long ere this, the noise of the duel had spread down beach and up street. The audience had been increasing for some time,

and now the shop was quite full—crowded to success, as we say—and a solid wedge of humanity was slowly forcing itself in at the door. Penticost, finding it impossible to work with his arms tightly pinned to his sides, threw down his hammer with a mute gesture of despair.

Still we waited for James to speak. Somebody thought we had waited long enough. A voice piped up from the back of the crowd, the voice of that profuse babbler, Jan Tripp.

“Spaking of cats,” he began, blinking his eyes and smiling that knowing smile which deludes strangers into searching desperately for veins of hidden humour in every trivial word he utters—“spaking of cats, our Job snore like a Christian. An’t a night but what he wake the missus up with his snoring. Snore like thunder, our Job do, and wake the missus up every night, ’most. That’s our Job; that’s av ’um, b’lieve; snore like thunder; missus can’t get her sleep for Job’s snoring. An’t many cats you’ll find do that—snore fit to wake the house up. The missus, she stick her elbow in my chest. ‘Wake up, Jan,’ she say, ‘and hark to the fond little feller snoring.’

Ess, he's a masterpiece, our Job is; snore like thun——"

The bland voice of Sam Jago was heard.

"Jan, shall I lend 'e a pair of scissors to cut that yarn?"

Jan subsided amid general laughter, which was instantly hushed as James-over-to-shop suddenly sat up, took his pipe out of his mouth, and pointed the stem at Bessie's Tom. Accepting Tom's challenge, he shifted his ground, discarded the whole menagerie of cats, hares, rabbits and snails, and took up tobacco.

Look now. Nine times out of ten, if a man went into the dark, smoking a pipe, and if the darkness were such that he couldn't see the smoke issuing from his mouth, then, nine times out of ten, that man wouldn't know whether his pipe were alight or no. Nine times out of ten, mind: James was a chapel-member, and wouldn't venture farther than that. But as sure as he had a pipe in his hand at the present moment, nine times out of ten, if a man went into the dark, smoking, and couldn't see the smoke or the glow from the bowl, nine times out of ten he wouldn't know what he was smoking—'bacca, tea or hay—or whether he was smoking at all. "And that," said James,

rolling down the lower fold of his guernsey and extracting thence a match, which he struck and applied to the bowl of his pipe, "that shows smoking edn' no good."

The keener critics among us admired the sudden and artful manner in which, with that last sentence, James shifted the field of argument from taste to morals. Would Tom meet him on the higher ground?

Tom was ready.

What were James's words? "That shows smoking edn' no good." Very well. Now suppose James to be smoking, as he was now, and let Tom come and take James's pipe out of his mouth, and say he shouldn't smoke no more. Well and good. Now consider the pipeless James in two hours' time. What would he be doing? For a wager, he would be thinking upon his pipe. And in four hours' time? Still his mind would be on his pipe. And in six? Would his fond mind have strayed from that pipe? And what about next day? Why, 'twould be all pipe and nothing else with James's mind by that time. What did this prove? The gross error of James's contention that smoking wadn' no good. It was manifest that nothing short of

his pipe would soothe James's mind in the case propounded. Therefore smoking *was* of some good. It soothed the mind.

In all your colleges and parliament houses, did you ever hear a subtler bit of reasoning than that? We chorused approval. James was condemned this time, sure enough.

James, evidently at a loss, fell back on a formula.

"That's all right," he said. "I an't saying nothing 'bout that. But——"

We never heard the rebutment. Bessie's Tom broke in, hot with indignation. What was all this paltering and shuffling? A man was a man, wasn't he? And what was more, a man's mind was a man's mind. You couldn't get over that; it was universally acknowledged that a man's mind was a man's mind. Therefore, as he said, James was manifestly wrong in asserting that a pipe wadn' no good, since it soothed a man's mind. Moreover, he would confidently add that it also settled a man's stomach. Take from a man his mind and his stomach, and where would that man be? Nowhere, as you might say—lower than the beasts of the field, who, lacking mind, possessed stomachs in abundance. A cow had three or

four, so he had heard tell, and that only strengthened his argument. If a man had as many stomachs as a cow, 'twould be a poor look-out for him when his food happened to disagree with him. Tom often suffered grievously from indigestion himself, but, after that, he was not the man to turn round and blaggard his stomach, as James was traitorously doing by implication.

For answer, James begged to remind Tom that nine times out of ten, if a man went into the dark, smoking a pipe—

Tom had heard that before. And a man's mind was a man's mind, after that.

"Nine times out of ten," said James, raising his voice.

"And a man's stummick's a man's stummick," said Tom, doing likewise.

"Nine times out of ten," persisted James, louder still, "that man——"

"—Stummick!" shouted Tom. "If 'tedn', what is, I'd like to know?"

"—That man couldn' tell——" bellowed James.

"Mind and stummick, there's your man!" yelled Tom. "Take they two away, and where's——"

“—Couldn’ tell if ’twas alight or no !” roared James.

Then, flushed with triumph, Tom rose from his seat and delivered the final, decisive blow. The sound of it still rings in our ears.

Not so. He *could* tell. When such a contingency occurred, experienced smokers were in the habit of protruding the under lip and adroitly puffing the pungent smoke up into their eyes. If, when they puffed, their eyes smarted and watered, they knew the pipe was alight, and were happy.

That ended the great debate ; for James-over - to - shop’s—“ Foolishness ! Never heard tell of no such foolishness—never in my life ! ”—could not be regarded as a serious contribution to the discussion ; and his noisy reiteration of it as he retreated from the assembly was merely a clamorous confession of defeat.

THE DEFEAT OF THE AMAZONS

WE know not if the rest of the world be better enlightened, but to us at Porthjulyan the ways of womankind are a profound mystery. That man's destined mate should be utterly incomprehensible to him is as strange as it is certainly true. All Sam Jago's brilliant epigrams on the sex, when you come to analyse them, are only witty confessions of this humiliating fact. I have heard of a wise conclave of lawyers and doctors who once decided that a man was in no way akin to his own mother; and surely they were right. We won't deny a certain superficial resemblance as to language diet, disposition of features, and the like; but probe below the surface, and what do you find? An unimaginable discrepancy.

What is man? To deal for convenience' sake with the concrete, what is Bessie's Tom? Bessie's Tom is a rational creature of noble ideals and lofty imagination, a deft logician, a

humorist of the first water—in short, Nature's masterpiece. And as Bessie's Tom is, so are we all at Penticost's, more or less. Deprive us of our ideals, our imagination, our logic and our humour, and what should we be but gibbering apes, whom humanity would disown straightway?

Has woman any of these qualities in the least degree? Take humour. We go home from the club and tell our wives a merry tale of Penticost, his stool, and a bit of codgy-wax intervening. Do they laugh? I trow not. As like as not, they only vilify us for tormenting an inoffensive old man in his own shop. As for logic, their notorious deficiency in this respect has long been the common discourse of nations; it can only be paralleled by their utter lack of imagination. I'll give you an insight. After the great debate was over, James-over-to-shop, defeated but not convinced, carried home his cherished cat-pie, and set it before his wife, seeking sympathetic support. What was the result? At the very outset she caught him up, and would hear no more, declaring that Thomas and Simons were both respectable men, who would never betray their customers in so senseless and disgusting a

fashion. No imagination, you see. And when he tried her with his other argument, the one that proved that smoking wadn' no good, she showed her crass ignorance of the nature of logic by suggesting that in that case he had better cast all his pipes into the fire, and a good riddance too.

We grant their possession of ideals of a sort, but ideals so ignoble as to be scarce worthy of the name. Take home life. A man's domestic ideal is a purely spiritual one — comfort; a woman's is cleanliness, which is grossly material. No wonder then that, spirit and matter inevitably clashing, we, the heirs of the ages, are driven to take off our sea-boots in front gardens and smoke precarious pipes in cold, draughty back kitchens. But there! as Sam Jago says—

“Woman! You read all about her in Genesis, and a pretty job she made of things, sure 'nough. Scat creation first go-off, b'lieve, and been dancing 'pon the shards ever since. If 'twadn' for she, you and me 'ud be in the Garden this day, stroking the lions and tickling the tigers.”

We notice this, that women do markedly resemble cows. Take them singly, and they are more or less amenable, if not to reason, at least

to gentle persuasion and loving discipline. But in the herd they are all horns and hoofs; on the least provocation, on no provocation at all, it's up heels with them and a mad coursey round the field. Then there's no holding them; over the gate with you, unless you've a mind to be gored and trampled. In my description of our little town, I omitted all reference to Juliana's: purposely, since Penticost's (of which I aspire to be the humble mouthpiece) has reason to regard Juliana's as a public nuisance, a foul blot or excrescence on our community, about which, for our fair fame, it were best to keep silence before the world. But now I have a tale to tell of grievous peril, of siege, of seeming rout and glorious victory, wherein Juliana's figures as the fell adversary. So of Juliana's I must speak perforce, or leave my tale untold.

Juliana Julyan possesses the noblest mangle in the town, and does the washing for our aristocracy and go-about women. At her gate the feet of all our wives are stayed when scandal is hatching. In fact, Juliana's is a kind of distorted feminine counterfeit of Penticost's, and over against Penticost's it is set, with the width of the street between. But

whereas Penticost's, with characteristic male modesty, burrows half underground, Juliana's looks down on the street from a brazen altitude. The rites of the mangle are performed in an inner room, of which, since no male creature has ever entered it, I can give you no description, only hinting darkly that not only sheets and aprons are mangled there. But the washing is done in the front yard, in the sight of all the world. Now this yard is planned on the model of a fortified place. It is approached by steps, which are barred at the top by an iron wicket; and round it runs a goodly rampart of stone, breast-high within, and towering over the heads of those without. From this commanding situation the fair garrison can not only pour their broadside on the adversary as he passes, but also rake him fore and aft as he approaches and retires, from the top of the street right down to the water's edge. Add to these strategic advantages the fact that the leader of the Amazons, Juliana herself, is a big woman, whose perpetually rolled-up sleeves display a pair of notably muscular arms, whose voice is of extraordinary volume and penetration, and whose temper the fumes of the washing-tray have not mellowed, to say the least—and you

will realise what a power in the land Juliana's can be in times of excitement.

Now, while our sweet enemies confine themselves to fashioning, adorning and disseminating true tales about one another and ourselves, we make no complaint. 'Tis the pretty way of the sex, and can no more be helped or hindered than spring-tides or kittens. But, as I have hinted, they are subject to periodic fits of dementia, during which the orderly life of the town is disorganised, domestic peace takes wing, and even the cloistral seclusion of Penticost's is not exempt, as you will see, from peril of disturbance.

Some time ago, Orlando Chynoweth—stuttering Orlando—was so unlucky as to come in for a legacy of seventy pounds. Straightway Minnie Hunkin upped and married him. A dashy piece is Minnie, of the variety known to us as “crame 'pon pilchers”—a flower-garden in her hat, and generally enough mud on her boots and petticoats to teel the same in. We didn't expect any great things of the match (which, to do him justice, was none of Orlando's seeking), and we were not disappointed. We are accustomed to give our bridegrooms a full month's leave from club attendance ; but barely

a fortnight had elapsed from the wedding-day when Orlando reappeared at Penticost's. We rallied him briskly, and the sickly grin that was his only answer spoke volumes to every married man among us. Bessie's Tom called truce to raillery, and made sympathetic inquiry.

"Tongue, Orlando?"

"T-tongue 'tis," stammered Orlando. "T-tongue till the cows come home, and then she t-talk in her sleep beside."

"Ah!" said Tom, winking on the company. "And your speech being afflicted as 'tis, you can't answer back so smart as you might: edn' that so?"

"Haven' spit out a c-clean word for weeks," said Orlando. "Don't get t-time."

"Ah!" said Tom. "Tell 'e what 'tis, Orlando: man with your affliction didn' ought to marry, that's plain. *Cause or just impediment*, the Prayer Book say; *impediment*—that's aimed at 'e straight. Have 'e tried swearing? If I mind right, your dees were always better gressed, like, than your Christian speech."

"T-true," said Orlando mournfully. "So they were. But now they'm like the rest—snails crawling through t-tar."

"I've heard tell," said James-over-to-shop,

putting his ponderous shoulder to the joke, "of a man that was plagued that way, and he put his wife snug in the asylum before the year was out. Never said nothing, f'rall her holling and bawling, but just sissed like a cat all the while—like this, *fiss*—to everything she said. And in six months she was as mad as a curley. Seeming to me, you could do that easy, Orlando."

Orlando shook his head hopelessly.

"Try the stick," said somebody.

Again Orlando shook his head. "She'd have me up," he said.

"Smash the cloam," suggested another. (You English call it crockery.)

"Aw, don't 'e do that, my dear!" cried Penticost, his hammer suspended in mid-air. "There was a man up Tregarry did that, and the woman gathered up the shards and put a crust round them, and baked them and give them the man for a pasty to carr' to his work. They call him the Shardy-Pasty Man to this day, and the last state of that man is worse than his first."

All this while Sam Jago had been absorbed in whittling a stick down in his retired corner. Now he looked up.

"Orlando," he said, his eyes twinkling, "how don't 'e put her head in a sack?"

Orlando peered doubtfully at Sam.

"N - no, Sam," he stutcred. "You - you d-don't mane that, do 'e?"

It was delightful to see how serious Sam made himself of a sudden.

"'Tis the only course for 'e to steer, Orlando," he said, with grave emphasis; "your nat'ral weapon (that's your tongue, Orlando) being out of gear. The stick—that's assault and battery; but a sack—a commojous flour-sack, now—that's warm and comforting. Heave en over her head, pull en well down over her arms, and skip out o' the way of her legs, and you'm all right. She can't holler, nor she can't use her claws; leave her be so for a bit, and she'll soon see the error of her ways."

Orlando pondered, while we contained ourselves as best we could.

"I've a t-terrible mind to try," he said at length.

"Do 'e now," urged the persuasive Sam. "And if so be all do go well, us'll bless 'e and lay in a stock for ourselves—a sack to every married man. 'Twill be the salvation of the town."

Orlando meditated a little longer. Then suddenly, without another word, he got up and went out.

"My life, he'll do it!" exclaimed Bessie's Tom. "He've gone to fetch the sack! Sam Jago, you'm a masterpiece!"

How we laughed! But a peep into futurity would have twisted our faces the other way.

Orlando did it, sure enough. From Penticost's door he went straight to the shop, whence he emerged with mild determination on his face and an empty flour-sack over his arm. Home he went. The sack caught Minnie's eye; her instant and particular inquiries remaining unanswered, resolved themselves into a flood of comprehensive vituperation. Orlando gave her two minutes' law, and proceeded gravely and faithfully to carry out Sam's instructions; not without difficulty, for the sack was none of the largest, and Minnie was a stout young woman and well set up. The enveloping movement carried out, Orlando retired from the field, shutting the door behind him. Presently a neighbour, hearing mysterious sounds, peeped in at the window and beheld a strange headless figure curiously gyrating

round the room to an accompaniment of muffled squealing music, as of distant bagpipes. With some labour Minnie was extracted, breathless, dishevelled, and ghastly white; for the flour-sack had not been entirely emptied of its contents. Powdered as she was from head to waist—an incomplete image of Lot's wife—she rushed into the street, tore down along, and captured Orlando just as he was turning into Penticost's to report progress. I am not going to tell you what happened next. It is the reverse of creditable to our little town that such a spectacle of manly humiliation—humiliation of the grossest kind—should have been offered to the public eye; though at the time, to be sure, we laughed—traitors that we were—as we had never laughed before.

Next day we met to laugh again, heedless of a certain murmurous agitation that buzzed and swelled about Juliana's yard, as about a hive in swarming time. For, as we presently knew, the sex was up in arms, and the little domestic incident over which we were quietly chuckling had been elevated over the way into an event of great political importance. In home-talk overnight some indiscreet male had divulged the source of Orlando's action. That

was enough: by the mysterious alchemy of the feminine brain Sam Jago's innocent bit of waggery was transmuted into a deep organised plot against wifely rights and privileges. The suspicious hatred of clubs natural to woman, and the rankling jealousy of Penticost's in particular, which, thanks to Penticost himself, is always ahead of Juliana's in the matter of news, were ready at hand to fan the flame.

The first mutterings of the storm passed, as I said, unheeded. But presently, as we sat placidly chewing the cud of the joke, we heard a smart shower of taunts and execrations come pattering down from above, and immediately afterwards Bessie's Tom dived in, ducking his head and shaking his ears.

"Piph-ph!" he exclaimed. "The women have gone clean mazed, I think. Such profaning I never heard in all my married days. Hark to them—like a passel of gulls on a rock!"

"What is it?" was asked.

"What is it? Minnie Chynoweth 'tis, and Orlando, and the flour-sack, and all of us. And Minnie's Foxe's *Martyrs* all complete, and we'in the persecuting Papishers. That's of it!"

We reconnoitred. To the door we did not

venture, but by leaning over the table and peering up through the lower panes of the window we could just take in the top of Juliana's rampart. We saw a row of bobbing heads, with swiftly moving jaws and red, furious faces turned ever and anon in our direction; and not a man among us but discreetly jerked himself back after the first peep. We looked at one another; and the silence in the shop, which was as the silence of interstellar space, was pierced by shrill meteors, imperfectly discerned, but obviously of dire import.

"There's trouble brewing, b'lieve," said James-over-to-shop, weakly enough.

"The sperit of the devil's in their stumicks!" exclaimed Sam Jago, whose concise vigour of speech never deserts him.

"A time of war and tribulation's at hand," prophesied Penticost, "when your old men shall not slumber in their beds, and your young men shall hear voices in the night."

"Tay-time's at hand anyhow," said Bessie's Tom, with a brisk effort to dispel the gloom. "Who's going home along out o' this?"

Nobody stirred, and James remarked that we were safest where we were.

“Don’t ’e be too sure o’ that, my dears!” shrilled Penticost, peeping out of window. “If that edn’ Juliana coming across——”

There was a confused sound of shuffling feet as we rose to escape. But Juliana’s commanding figure already blocked the doorway. With mottled arms akimbo she stood, contemptuously surveying us. Then she spoke, with a sudden scream that jumped us. I venture to punctuate a speech that was innocent of all stops save such as exhausted nature called for.

“Men! Call yourselves men? A nest of hadders! Stuffle your lawful wives, will ’e, you blaggurds-worse-than-heathen-Turks? Ben’t left to spake our own minds in our own houses, ben’t us? Give us the sack—that’s of it, hey? A-ah! we’ve ben too soft with ’e; but stank upon us agin and we’ll bruise your heels proper, I assure ’e. Neighbours!”—she turned about, dramatically beckoning—“step up and look upon ’em, if your stummicks will stand the sight.” Mænad faces gecked through the window; it was like a horrid nightmare. “Look upon ’em, neighbours! They come to us, soft-soaping and putting their heads under their wings, the hadders, so’s you don’t know which way they’m going to fly next; and then when

they've catched us they shove us into sacks—into flour-sacks they shove us, and so whiten our heads before their time, the scheming hadders! Don't grin 'pon me, Sam Jago!" (Sam had donned the patient smile of the good man frowned on by Fortune.) "The likes of you ben't fit to look a h-honest woman in the face. You'm the worst of the bunch, and if I was Amelia Jago I'd leave 'e know. Put 'e in a sack yourself, so I would; ess, into a coal-sack I'd put 'e, and then you wouldn' be blacker'n what you be already. Eyah-h! A nest of grizzling hadders!"

"Here, missus!" It was Bessie's Tom who spoke, with a courage born of desperation. "Here, missus, this won't do. Agin regulations, you see."

"What do the lazy pauper mane?" inquired Juliana.

Tom turned very red, and it was with a trembling finger that he pointed to the rules on the wall.

"Rule three," he stammered. "No women allowed. There 'tis. See for yourself."

Juliana strode across the shop, taking no more notice of Penticost as she upset him than if he had been a worm. The next moment

Tom received his rules in his face, in the shape of a crumpled ball.

"*That* for your rules," remarked Juliana, as the missile flew. She stalked back to the door and faced us again.

"Sim 'me, you'm mazed?" gasped Tom.

Juliana dropped a mocking curtsey.

"A wake woman if you plaise," she said, "but sound in body *and* in mind. Siss so long as you've a mind to, hadders! You waan't drive *me* to the asylum." Her eye was on the guilty, squirming James-over-to-shop. Was nothing hid from this terrible person? "Ess, a wake woman, but my conscience is clane, and I can stand up agin the lot of 'e and call 'e heathen Turks and growling hadders and everything but men, and there an't one among 'e that can flip forth his tongue to call *me* out 'o my name. Fah! I scorn 'e! I've seen better men than you set up in a medder to scare the sparrers. I've seen better men than you stuffed with straw and burnt in a bonfire." Here Juliana, with a fine sense of dramatic effect, began to depart backwards, step by step. "Not one of 'e but 'ud steal his wife's dead shoe-strings, give him the chance. No women allowed? We'll see 'bout

that, won't us, neighbours? We've borne with you and your club long enough." Light streamed through the unobstructed doorway, but Juliana's voice still assailed our ears. "A nest of ramping, roaring hadders, and call itself a club! We'll club them, as I'm a Christian woman!"

The voice grew faint, as Juliana and her retinue retired to their fortress; but still we caught fragments—

"Sacks! . . . Stuffle their wives! . . . Turks! . . . Hadders!"

We sat and stared at one another in blank silence. James forced a weak laugh.

"He-heh! Amoosing to hear her! Quite amoosing, I should say."

"That woman," exclaimed Bessie's Tom, in whose breast the sting of an injurious appellation still rankled, "that woman is a complete venom. That's what she is, a complete venom. Mind what I say: a complete venom, that woman is."

"What did I tell 'e, my dears?" cried Penticost. "A time of war and tribulation; those were my words; you heard me spake."

"My missus," said Sam Jago, "sent my Sunday shirt to the wash this week. My

name's stitched on the tail of it in red cotton for all the world to see. My heart do ache for that shirt."

"That's very well, Sam Jago," said Tom, turning savagely upon him. "You'm a smart joker, no doubt; but I ask you this. Who landed us in this here mess, with his smart jokes? Where's our refuge now in time of trouble? The venom's been here once; she'll be here agin; and I put the fault on you, Sam Jago. Ess, I condemn 'e to your face."

A renewed gust of invective shook the windows.

"Another hadder coming," said Sam, the imperturbable. "Ah! the deaf hadder this time," he added, as Archelaus Trudgeon entered, beaming and boisterous as usual.

"Hullo!" he roared. He has to roar to hear himself speak. "What's up with all of 'e? You'm looking like you done a roguery and was having it out with old Conscience. Wisht you'm looking: stick a knife into 'e and you'd get no blood. What's up?"

"Why, Archelaus," said James. "Didn' 'e notice nothing as you come along—no commotion, like, up over?"

No: Archelaus had noticed nothing unusual. We enlightened him briefly.

"Bless my poor ears!" he shouted. "They do me good sarvice, for all they ben't no use. The women can beller till the cows come home, for all I care. They can't reach me; I'm blockaded."

We found it in our hearts to envy the impenetrable armour that had brought Archelaus unscathed through storm and tumult.

Suddenly Sam Jago slapped his knee.

"I have en!" he exclaimed.

"What have 'e?"

"A way out of this. Come here, Archelaus."

Archelaus is so deaf that whispers and shouts are all one to him. But let him watch a man's mouth, and he can tell what that man is saying by the movement of his lips. Sam, who loves an impish mystification, now baffled us by making a perfectly voiceless communication to Archelaus, who punctuated it with tantalising nods and explosions of laughter. The colloquy ended, Sam arose and said—

"Me and Archelaus is going outside. They that want to go home can go; they that want to see a bit of fun can stay. Now, forlorn hope, for'ard."

Sam and Archelaus marched out. The storm burst forth anew. For a few moments

it raged unchecked; then we heard the bellow of Archelaus above it, dominant, supreme, like the roar of thunder over pelting rain.

"Ah, Juliana my dear, good arternoon! How's your health? Seeming to me, you ben't looking so brave as you might. You women drink too much tay, that's the truth. I say tay," he added in an aside to Sam—and his asides are louder, if anything, than his direct speech—"I say tay to save the woman's feelings, but brandy's the true tale, as all the world do know."

A petrified silence. Then Juliana collected herself, and the private character of Archelaus fell in rags about his feet.

"Did Juliana speak?" he asked, all affability. "Would 'e mind saying that over agin, Juliana?—and spake up, if you please. I'm a bit deafer than usual to-day. Or else," he roared in Sam's ear, "or else the woman's too fur gone to spake plain."

The raving incoherence of Juliana's reply betrayed her plight, like the disorderly rally of defeated troops. Archelaus only shook his head wistfully.

"I know 'tis something terrible int'resting, Juliana; but I'm properly deaf to-day, sure

'nough. Poor woman!" he murmured, and a stentorian murmur it was. "Local Option—that's what we want."

"She glazed," said Sam, describing the scene afterwards, "she glazed, and guggled, and swayzed her hands, helpless-like, and then flop! indoors and door shut home."

Archelaus smiled pensively and singled out another Amazon. But I need not go into the details of the slaughter—call it not combat. As ultimate victors we can afford to be generous, and to be sure Archelaus was not over nice in his choice of weapons. The buried scandals that saw resurrection in the next few minutes had best be committed to earth again in decorous silence. The fight was soon over. Deserted by their leader, confronted by an adversary who was absolutely invulnerable against their only weapon, the rebels soon broke and fled withindoors, leaving us—we were all outside by then, even Penticost in apron and shirt-sleeves—masters of the situation. Archelaus received our heartfelt congratulations, nor were we backward in thanking the ingenious Sam.

Since then we have had no further trouble with Juliana's.

THE SILK HAT

WHEN James-over-to-shop returned from his memorable visit to London Churchtown, we gathered from his narrative that the three most notable features of the mighty metropolis are, first the Chamber of Horrors in Baker Street, secondly the sooty sparrows that squabble in every gutter, and thirdly the silk hats of the London clerks. In other respects, as James points out, London is merely a magnified St. Kenna, and provides no new sensations for him who has been to market once or twice. The houses are somewhat loftier, the crowds a trifle bigger, but at bottom 'tis the same thing ; and James, as a philosopher to whose imagination mere size appeals in vain, thrust aside the inessential mobs and skyscrapers, and fastened unerringly on the salient features which make London what it is—unique, unforgettable ; to wit, as I said, the horrid murders in waxwork, the innumerable

sparrows all black as ink, and the countless silk hats. Especially when he dilates on these last does he rise to lyric heights, till Penticost's hammer hangs idle in his lifted hand, and their wonted fires die out from the ashes of Bessie's Tom's pipe. It was James's good fortune to be present at a suburban station one morning in time to witness the daily procession of London clerks from start to finish. Indeed, he got up betimes for that very purpose. He arrived at the station between six and seven o'clock — somewhat too early, as he found; but the spectacle was well worth waiting for. First singly, then in their twos and threes, then in their tens, their fifties, and their hundreds, the London clerks poured in; and James solemnly assures us that he failed to detect more than three or four felt hats in all that glorious throng. It was as grand a sight as ever he beheld, says James, and we can well believe him.

You will rightly infer that the silk, drum, or box hat, as we indifferently style it, is of rare occurrence in our little town. In fact, until lately we could boast of only one that belonged to the place. There are two now, and of the second I have a story to tell; but I cannot let

this opportunity pass without making some respectful reference to the first and its wearer.

Sitting on the Seat of Honour down beach, any time of the day when the sun is abroad, you may see the patriarch of Porthjulyan, Uncle Augustus Hunkin. Stout, ruddy, white-haired, he is youthful yet, for all his eighty odd years. His eyesight is not quite what it was a decade ago, but his hearing is as keen as ever, his voice hearty, hearty his appetite, and heartiest the excellent loud laugh that manages to find an appropriate place in well-nigh every sentence he utters. For cheerful philosophy he is hard to beat. It is a favourite saying of his that he would wish to die fourpence in debt. Asked for the secret of long life, he replies—"Content, and so much beef as you can put away"; or, as a variant—"Chaw hard and laugh hearty." Speculating on the span of life still remaining to him, he prophesies—"I look for a fit to carr' me off—a fit o' laughing, ho-ho!" And he suggests for an appropriate inscription on his headstone—*Here lies Uncle Augustus, that died of a quip.* As for his failing eyesight, that troubles him not; nor will it, says he, until he is no longer able to distinguish a pretty maid from

her grandmother. So long as you can do that, says Augustus, you have no reason to complain.

Uncle Augustus and his drum-hat have no separate existence in the minds of most of us. Never seen apart, they are much of an age, I should judge; though there are some who declare that the hat is by far the elder of the two, and was indeed cast in a mould when Adam wore slippers, whenever that mythical epoch may have been. In any case, it is a wonderful structure; in these degenerate days you will search in vain for its match in loftiness of crown and curliness of brim. Some may think that its ancient dignity is degraded by the way its owner has of wearing it continually at the extreme back of his head; and certainly it is a good example of the essential strangeness of things that two such venerable objects as Uncle Augustus and his hat should, by their mere juxtaposition at a certain angle, produce so rakish, young-man-about-townish an effect. Venerable indeed is that hat, not merely by reason of its antiquity, but because of the reverend associations that cluster about it. Uncle Augustus is a lifelong chapel-member, and for many years it was he who took up the Sunday collections in this very hat, first drop-

ping his handkerchief inside, that decorum might suffer no shock from the unseemly clink of coin. It was not until after the great revival of ten years ago, when membership increased enormously and offertories swelled in proportion, that it was deemed advisable for safety's sake to substitute a commonplace wooden box. Some of us can remember how, as small boys, we used to beguile the tedium of a long discourse by pleasantly speculating whether, in the event of a larger collection than usual, the crown or the brim of Uncle Augustus's hat would be the first to give way ; and when the hat was passed round, it was thrilling to think that the penny one was getting ready might be destined to play the part of the proverbial last straw, and bring a shower of bronze rattling about one's knees. But, as I said, the catastrophe was averted in time. Uncle Augustus and his hat retired from office to enjoy a well-earned repose in the sun down beach ; and there I will leave them, and pass on to the tale of the Stranger's Gift, and how it went perilously near to ruining the happiness of the loveliest young couple in Cornwall.

To begin with, a charitable hope may be

expressed that the gentleman from London meant well by it. Either he did, and was singularly lacking in a sense of humour and proportion, or else he was a practical joker of the most abandoned kind, and abominably ungrateful into the bargain. Mr. Smith came down to Porthjulyan for his health, and found a hearty welcome and comfortable accommodation at the Rowses' cottage. Jamesy Rowe had lately taken Julia Harvey to wife. Everything about the place was spick and span; Julia in her cookery blended the experience of the matron with the enthusiasm of the bride; there were no noisy children about; Mr. Smith came for a week and stayed a month.

On the morning of his departure he walked out on the cliffs to take a last view of the rocks and the sea, and to fill his lungs with a last draught of our medicinal air. The air was in a boisterous mood that morning; Mr. Smith's hat—one of those soft indented felt hats—was rudely snatched from his head and whirled over a sheer two hundred feet of cliff into the sea. So it happened that he drove away from our little town with a cloth cap of his host's on his head, and on his lips a gay promise to

return or replace the same within a few days.

To say that he was as good as his word would be untrue. He was far better—or worse—than his word. When on the following Saturday the bandbox arrived, and the impatient Julia had fetched Jamesy up from the beach, and Jamesy had cut the outer string and untied the inner tape and lifted the lid, a brand-new, glossy, black silk hat was disclosed to their astonished eyes. Exclamations burst simultaneously from the two; Julia's was of unalloyed rapture, Jamesy's was flavoured with a spice of dismay.

"Well now," said Julia, as she carefully extracted the gift from its swathings of tissue paper—"well now, I do call this handsome of Mr. Smith! A drum-hat! How it do shine! Real handsome, to be sure, and cost a pretty penny, I'll be bound."

"Shouldn' wonder," said Jamesy, regarding it with uneasy disfavour. "But what's going to do by en? That's what I want to know."

"Do, thou bufflehead?" cried Julia, with a fond smile to soften the rude word. "Do? Why, wear en, to be sure!"

So saying, she poised the hat delicately

between her finger-tips, raised herself on her toes, and set it on his head. With her own head prettily on one side she marked the effect.

"Grand! You'm the gentleman now, Jamesy! La! 'tis one o' these proud London clurks I've been and married, and no fisherman at all!"

"But, Julia!" exclaimed her dismayed husband, "I can't go about with this black drum thing 'pon my head. They'll all be laughing upon me!"

Julia compressed her lips. "Let them laugh if they've a mind to," said she.

"And what's more, I won't!" declared Jamesy.

Julia wrinkled her brow. "James Rowe," she said, "you'm talking foolish."

"I'm talking sense," protested Jamesy. "But I'd rather talk foolish than look foolish."

Julia's eyes flashed ominously. "James Rowe, you'm going to chapel with me to-morrow in the handsome hat the kind gentleman's sent 'e."

Jamesy shook his head. The hat promptly slid sideways over the close-cropped surface of his skull, and came to rest upon his left ear.

"There 'tis!" he exclaimed in disgust.

"Don't fit me, even! Bistly old thing! How's going to keep en on?—tell me that. If I go to take a step, I can feel him waggle."

"You got to larn," said his wife, in a determined tone. "It want some practice, 'course; but if others can wear 'em, so can you. And so you shall!"

Jamesy shook his head again, but not until he had first put up a steadying hand. Julia stamped her foot.

"And so you shall!" she repeated, on a higher note. "This very Sunday; or else you go to chapel alone."

"Why, Julia!" exclaimed her husband, aghast. "We ben't going to quarrel, sure! Me and my fond little wife!"

"A lot you care for your fond little wife!" choked she. "And—and I've been and married a man with no more proper pride than a wu-wurm, nor no more kind feelings than a Tu-turk!"

At the sight of tears, the first tears of their married life, Jamesy did as braver men have done, and surrendered at discretion.

"There! Shall be as you do wish—there!" The hat rolled on the floor unregarded, as he proceeded to make his peace in the only

possible fashion. But though subdued, he remained unconvinced, and his heart failed him when he thought of the morrow.

His misgivings were amply justified. Their walk to chapel next morning was humorously elevated by Porthjulyan into a triumphal procession. Subdued cheers were raised, hats were doffed, curtseys dropped, and a band of urchins beating imaginary drums cleared the way for the pair. Julia walked along, rigidly unconscious, her pretty nose in the air; while the victim of fashion, his hand convulsively grasping the unruly hat, alternately twisted an uneasy deprecatory grin on the spectators, and relaxed the same to whisper a savage "I told 'e so!" in his wife's ear. His arm ached consumedly, an iron band gripped his brow, and life was a bitter mockery. Surely Julia would now see reason, and relinquish this absurdest of social aspirations.

But Julia persisted. Some words of matronly scorn—a whispered "Think a brave lot of ourselves, don't us?"—a blunt outspoken "Julia Rowe, be you mazed to leave your man make such a may game of himself?"—roused her pride and stiffened her resolution.

"They'm jealous!" she declared. "Not

one of 'em but 'ud give her best bonnet to walk to chapel along of a hat like that."

Jamesy sighed, and stroked Peter the cat. He felt that a strong bond of sympathy united himself and Peter. When first the hat arrived, Peter had jumped up on the table to inspect it, as in duty bound he inspected everything that came into the house; and after a single sniff, Peter had lifted up his back and sworn aloud. Jamesy sighed, and thought of distressful times to come—times of wearisome chaff, of jokes mercilessly hammered in to the head. He glanced at Julia, as with frowning brow and pursed-up lips she brushed that ridiculous cylinder of silk and muslin. Was that his smiling, coaxing little wife? This was not matrimony as he had imagined it, nor as he had experienced it before this Trojan gift arrived. He wondered if a renewed resistance would be worth trying, and the deepest sigh of all acknowledged the futility of the notion.

Their customary Sunday walk on the cliffs, lover-like, arm a-crook, was omitted that afternoon without a word said on either side.

On Monday Jamesy's doleful expectations were fully realised. Chaff whirled about him as it whirls about the thresher in the rickyard.

Sam Jago had seen a majestic drum-hat come out of Jamesy's door, with something obscurely visible inside it that looked like a man, though Sam wasn't at all sure. Could Jamesy resolve the doubt? Bessie's Tom craved permission to feel the top of Jamesy's head, and detected a portentous swelling there, such as no ordinary head-gear could cover. An eruption of brains?—or of conceit? queried Tom. And our minor wits made up for their lack of subtlety by a sledge-hammer vigour and persistence. Such talk can only be answered in two ways—in kind, or else with blows; and Jamesy was neither witty nor warlike. He suffered in silence; that deprecatory smile was called for so often during the week that he began to wear it permanently. It greeted him in the glass when he shaved next Sunday morning; so looked, he thought, the patient grinning wooden figures you throw sticks at for cigars in fair-time.

The walk to chapel was a repetition of last week's progress, with added effects. And though the two walked side by side, a great gulf yawned between them. All the week they had been drifting apart. Sharp words had been spoken; looks had been exchanged, as black as the hat itself. Of *that* no syllable

was uttered ; but its image ever hovered between them, an inky spectre.

Jamesy began to grow desperate, and out of his desperation was born an Idea. It came to him that evening as they sat over the fire in the kitchen, together, yet apart ; and the Satanic beauty of it made him chuckle. Julia's heart leapt. For a whole week all mirth had been banished from that modest roof. Was her world about to right itself ? She put forth a timid, penitent hand ; a second chuckle caused her to draw it back as from a serpent, for this was unmistakably the laughter of the Pit.

On Monday morning Jamesy waited until Julia was out of the way. Then he stole upstairs, drew the bandbox from under the bed, took out the hat, rammed it well down over his brow, crept downstairs again, and sallied forth, whistling a merry tune.

Strange things have been seen at times in Porthjulyan, but in all its varied history nothing so strange as the spectacle of that day—an able-bodied fisherman in guernsey and sea-boots going quietly about his work, baiting hooks, handling ballast, hauling crab-pots, with a brand-new silk hat on his head. We

held our sides, and racked our brains for fresh quips. Jamesy went on with his work, placidly smiling. It was a calm sunny morning; all the world was a-glitter; but nothing on earth or sea that day surpassed the sheen of Jamesy's hat. Wherever it went the amazed sun devoured it with burning glances; on the beach it dazzled all eyes; far out at sea its lustre dominated the shimmering waves.

When Jamesy returned to dinner, there were traces of tears in Julia's eyes, but she said no word. The meal was eaten in stiff silence, and forth went the hat again to affront all heaven and earth with its easy supremacy of ugliness. Now we began to perceive that the joke had somehow been transferred from our own hands to Jamesy's; we ceased to mock, and professed ourselves ready to laugh with Jamesy instead of against him. Jamesy opened two serious eyes, averring that he saw no humour in the hat; it was a handsome hat, and comfortable enough when one got used to it; if he chose to wear it at his work, whose concern was that? Not altogether at our ease, we returned to our scoffing.

Husband and wife, meeting over the teapot, exchanged searching glances, read "No sur-

render" in each other's eyes, and sat down to table, mute and sullen.

In the night the wind got up, and Julia's spirits rose with it. The elements were ranging themselves on her side; to-morrow would be a day for close-fitting caps. But on the morrow Jamesy retired upstairs for half an hour, and when he came down he was suitably rigged to encounter the rankest southeaster that ever blew. Eyelet holes had been bored in the brim of the hat, and an ingenious arrangement of guy-ropes in twine and elastic, passing from either side under Jamesy's chin, made all taut and snug. Julia refrained from tears and hardened her heart.

On Wednesday, casual visitors drifted in from Polgoose, Tregarry and elsewhere, lured by a strange tale of a mad fisherman. Their laughter was offensively loud and long, and we began to think that the joke had gone far enough for the credit of the town. Remonstrances were addressed to Jamesy. He listened, and in reply began to preach with quiet earnestness the Cult of the Silk Hat. He bade us note the advantages it conferred. It was at once a commodious head-covering, a stately ornament, and an unequivocal mark

of rank. It added inches to the wearer's physical stature; to his social stature yards. It was also a convenient portable store-cupboard for pipe, 'bacca-pouch, handkerchief, spare fish-hooks, pasties and what not. Moreover, with what ease did its happy possessor achieve that most difficult of marine manœuvres—the expeditious lighting of his pipe in a gale of wind, when all Bryant and May, you would say, were impotent and unavailing! Some took sacks to sea, and retired within them at the critical moment; he, superior, disdained such clumsy makeshifts. Jamesy concluded by exhorting all Porthjulyan to follow his example, and invest to a man in silk hats. Puzzled and baffled, we retired to shake our heads in corners.

But Sunday was again drawing near, and Jamesy began to grow nervous and apprehensive; for Julia showed no glimpse of the white flag. Daily her face grew harder; their intercourse was strictly limited to words of briefest necessity. His heart misgave him; he feared he had gone too far; and at last he pocketed his pride and murmured a tender contrite word. For answer, Julia rose and left the room.

Saturday was a day of wind and rain, and Jamesy found himself in an unpleasant predicament. The weather made it a day of idle lounging under cellar walls; but it would be carrying the joke far beyond the limits of jocosity to expose the lustrous surface of the hat to the showers, while to issue forth without it would be to acknowledge his defeat. On the other hand, a wet day spent indoors with a hostile, speechless spouse offered small prospect of comfort and entertainment. Yet rather that, than own himself beaten. Give in at this stage? Never! He took *The Seaman's Manual* from the little heap of books on the parlour sideboard, settled himself squarely at the kitchen table, and began to study landmarks and currents. Landmarks and currents soon palled on him; his idle hands itched for mischief; he fetched the hat, and, by a refinement of malice, began sedulously to smooth and polish it under Julia's nose. Julia continued to go about her work, coldly indifferent. Baffled, he set the hat down, brim upwards, on the table before him, and again strove to interest his miserable wits in tides and channels. Julia finished her Saturday dusting and sweeping, took a chair in the remotest corner of the

room, and bent her head over some needle-work.

To this situation of dumb tragedy, enter the winged Goddess from the machine.

A fond young couple, be they ever so fond, will feel the need of other objects on which to lavish their superfluous store of tenderness. In course of time the void is usually filled in a perfectly legitimate and delightful way, but meanwhile the reign of furred and feathered pets endures. Jamesy's especial favourite was Peter the cat; Julia distributed her affection among a dignified family of Bantams, reserving the cosiest nook in her heart for Spotty, who was the youngest of the three hens, and small for her age. Spotty had been reared from microscopic chickenhood by Julia's own hands; her earliest associations were centred round a cardboard box at the back of the "apparatus," as we call the kitchen range at Porthjulyan; and now that she had grown up, affection and habit combined to bring her in and about the house all day. It was she who, drenched and buffeted by rain and wind, now tapped impatiently with her beak at the back door. Julia got up and let her in. She clucked her thanks in a shrill treble,

and stalked to the fireside, where she perched on the fender and began to preen her draggled feathers.

Jamesy relinquished his book, Julia her needlework, and both contemplated Spotty with eyes of anxious affection. The cares of approaching motherhood were weighing for the first time on Spotty's mind. Her comb was as red as fire, she cackled in preoccupied tones from morn to night, she shunned her fellow fowls: all of which symptoms pointed unmistakably to eggs. Yet no eggs appeared. Much time was spent in inspecting eligible sites for nests; but whether from youthful caprice or from aristocratic fastidiousness (she was a Bantam of high lineage), Spotty could settle on none to her taste. Her health suffered, her appetite declined, and her master and mistress had good reason for anxiety.

Her toilette completed, Spotty hopped from the fender and minced daintily about the room, her neck bobbing gracefully at every step, her round bright eye peering this way and that. Jamesy could not refrain from a glance at Julia, nor Julia from a glance at Jamesy; their eyes met and dropped in confusion. The same thought had occurred to both at the same

moment. Spotty, undaunted by many disappointments, was still searching for that eligible site. They watched her make the round of the room, and detected in her frequent clucks a whole gamut of emotions—hope, confidence, doubt, dismay, despair. They entered fully into her feelings, and when she hopped on to the window-sill and craned her neck wistfully towards that ostrich egg in a mossy hanging basket, the counterpart of which is to be found in every well-appointed cottage in Porthjulyan, neither was at a loss to interpret her regretful “Kuk-uk!”

“A nest ready-made of the best materials,” it said, “and in it a superb nest-egg. I am sorely tempted. But the egg is somewhat of the largest. I doubt my powers. My inexperience is against me. I will be prudent, and refrain.”

From the window-sill to Jamesy’s shoulder was a single fluttering leap; another took her from Jamesy’s shoulder to the table. Two steps she advanced; then she paused, with one diminutive foot upraised, the claws of it clenching and relaxing with emotion, her abstracted left eye on Julia, her excited right on the Hat. Julia’s sewing fell from her lap. The fire was

transferred to Spotty's left eye as she brought it in turn to bear on the hat, while she now held Jamesy with her right. Jamesy drew a long breath. Spotty lowered her foot, took a slow hesitant step, and stood again at one-legged attention. No pin dropped, so no sound was heard. Then Spotty hesitated no longer. A deft jump, a balancing wing momentarily outstretched, and she stood safe and steady on the hat-brim. She peeped within. Her right eye ascertained that the interior was as roomy as any Bantam could desire ; her left made sure that it was clean, and comfortably, nay, luxuriously lined. The next moment Spotty had disappeared inside the hat.

Jamesy's fist, raised for a delighted bang on the table, was arrested in mid-air by a warning "Hush!" from Julia. Once more their eyes met, and this time lingered, saying many things. Jamesy was rising impulsively, when Julia waved him back, and with another gesture indicated the hat. The crisis was not yet over.

Two interminable minutes they waited, with hearts that beat absurdly high. Then, as in a conjuring trick, Spotty reappeared on the hat-brim, shook her ruffled feathers into composure, ogled her two friends simultaneously with two

divergent glittering eyes, and remarked in tones of triumphant assurance—

“Tuk-tuk-tuk-tuk-tra-a-aa-tuk!”

Together they rushed to the hat, and Jamesy’s arm was about Julia’s waist as they peeped within, and beheld the tiniest, frailest, most delightful egg that ever mortal Bantam laid.

“That settles it,” said Jamesy, with solemn conviction.

“That settles it,” echoed Julia, between laughter and tears.

“We’ve been two fools,” declared Jamesy.

“Two fools we’ve been,” agreed Julia.

“Do ’e fancy she’d like some green meat?” said he.

“I’ll put some Indian corn in soak for her this minute,” said she.

“Whatever she do fancy, she shall have.”

“Whatever she do have, she deserve.”

“Do ’e think ’twould be safe to move the hat?”

“Best not. Leave well alone, say I. It might put her off.”

“Where’s my cap? I must go tell ’em down beach.”

“In your *cap*? They won’t know ’e!”

"Aw well, I ben't in no hurry, come to think of it. I'll stay here for a bit with my fond little wife."

"A lot you care for your fond little wife!"

"You'm right," declared Jamesy fervently.
"I do that. A brave lot."

For a month the hat remained undisturbed on the kitchen table. Seven eggs were laid, and seven successfully hatched. Then, when Spotty had led her diminutive brood—they were about as big as walnuts—forth into the world, the bandbox was fetched, and the hat went into honourable retirement, there to remain until Jamesy's younger brother was about to get married, when he solicited the loan of it for the occasion. Its appearance added much to the dignity of the ceremony, and several of the maidens who were present registered mental vows, with the result that now no wedding in our little town is considered complete unless Jamesy's hat decorates the bridegroom's brow. And so I leave it, encircled with a genial halo, and promising in time, if not to supplant Uncle Augustus' bell-topper in our affections, at least to occupy an equally honoured place.

A GOVERNMENT ALLIANCE

IN the Sunday paper—"that vile Radical rag," as the parson calls it—of which we are diligent students at Porthjulyan, we notice that Gov'ment is frequently figured forth in the likeness of an old woman, slow, obstinate, fussy, and muddle-headed. And certainly the action of Gov'ment in maintaining such an expensive and redundant establishment as it does in our orderly little town, reminds us of nothing so much as the behaviour of an aged and eccentric widow-lady of means who once dwelt in the big house at Sunny Corner. She kept two servants, a cook and a housemaid, of whom she demanded no service, and with whom she held no communication, save to pay their wages. She did her own marketing, cooked her own meals over the drawing-room fire, darned her own stockings, and made her own bed. When asked why she went to the expense of keeping domestics at all, she would explain that the cook was there

to prepare her own meals—and the housemaid's; while the housemaid was sufficiently occupied in keeping tidy her own bedroom—and the cook's. Similarly Gov'ment pays, lodges, and doctors the whole staff of Gov'ment Buildings—chief officer, chief boatman, and eight hulking coastguardsmen with their wives and families—simply and solely (so far as we can make out) for the sake of keeping the walls of the said buildings up to the mark in the matter of whitewash, and of maintaining the kitchen fires with driftwood.

No doubt if you gained access to Gov'ment and questioned it, it would declare that nothing was farther from its mind than driftwood, unless it were whitewash, and it would probably begin to prate of supposititious smugglers and hypothetical wrecks. But of course the smuggling days are over long ago. We are sure of this, because the guide-books and newspapers all say so, and we do our best to explain the cheapness of brandy and tobacco hereabouts by a reference to the salubrity of the local climate, or, if that doesn't satisfy you, the self-sacrificing generosity of the local innkeepers.

As for wrecks—aha! you prick your ears; you have heard tell of Cornish wreckers. I

am sorry to disappoint you, but wrecks we have none. It has pleased an inscrutable Providence to set our town right in the middle of a deep bay, well out of the main road of ocean traffic. Our oldest inhabitant remembers but one wreck in our immediate neighbourhood, and that was a vessel laden with blocks of granite—a foolish, unnecessary sort of wreck, with no use or reason in it. No; Gov'ment may say what it pleases, but the fact remains that, so far as Porthjulyan is concerned, it lives, moves, and has its being in, for, and by white-wash and driftwood, and these only. In white-wash it wallows all day; of driftwood it dreams all night.

Now Gov'ment's whitewashing proclivities are harmless enough, but its inordinate hunger for driftwood is another matter—a very serious matter in a treeless district like ours, where fuel is scarce and hard to come by. Plenty of driftwood comes our way; there would be enough and to spare for all, if Gov'ment were not so greedy. As it is, we are lucky if a few sodden sticks fall to our share. I will give you an illustration, so that you may fully appreciate our attitude towards Gov'ment, as it is essential you should before hearing my story.

A fine autumn day. We are down on the beach, baiting hooks, drying nets, and so on. Gov'ment, having nothing else to whitewash for the time being, is out on the cliffs with pails and brushes, whitewashing select portions of the Cornish coast—a stone here, a boulder there, along the coastguard's path. A spar appears on the horizon. Who sees it first? The Gov'ment look-out man, posted on the cliff-top with a big telescope for that purpose and no other. What happens then? A ringing of electric bells, a shouting through telephones, a casting down of pails and brushes, and a general turn-out of the entire Gov'ment force. In ten minutes the Gov'ment gig is lying on its oars outside the cove, the chief boatman is on the cliff with flags, pistols, and signal-rockets, and every likely point for a mile along the coast has its blue-jacketed watcher. What chance have we of capturing that spar? What can we do but stand by and give vent to our feelings in ironical cheers when the gig returns with its booty in tow?

Now consider the habits and methods of Gov'ment as exemplified in the further history of that spar. It is hauled up into the watch-house. The chief officer approaches it with

measuring-tape and notebook; he studies it from every point of view; he goes home and writes to headquarters, giving its dimensions every way, the number of nails in it, the hour and minute of capture, and copious particulars of the state of wind, weather, and tide. Does the farce end there? I trow not. Something about the spar arouses the stern suspicions of Gov'ment, and for days the chief officer's brow is black with care, and his fingers with ink. At last Gov'ment decides that no treason or felony is discoverable in the spar. "Sell the spar," says Gov'ment. No expense is spared in advertisement, and soon the whole world knows that a proud and powerful Gov'ment has captured a fourteen-foot spar off Porthjulyan, and is ready to part with the same for a consideration. The sale is held, the spar successfully disposed of, and Gov'ment wipes its brow, drops the resultant half-crown into its pocket, and returns to its peaceful whitewashing.

Now you are in a position to understand and justify our attitude towards Gov'ment—an attitude subtly compounded of smouldering irritation and good-humoured contempt. In our eyes Gov'ment is the comic villain of the piece, loathed and laughed at by all. Under-

stand: with the staff of Gov'ment Buildings, as men, we have no quarrel; though as free Britons we cannot help despising men whose souls, whose very buttons, are not their own. Still, they are good fellows all, and we converse with them affably over gates, swapping yarns and showering light whitewashy banter. But we never forget that as officials they rank outside the scale of humanity. Our intercourse with them is all of a superficial kind, and between our inner lives and theirs so great a gulf is fixed that our respective womenfolk have absolutely no dealings together. This is as it should be. Every right-thinking citizen is the potential foe of Gov'ment, and in times of peace an armed neutrality, tempered with little non-committal courtesies, is the only proper attitude.

And now, I think, you are prepared to hear of young Wilkins and Jane Annie, of the dire peril with which they menaced the balance of power at Porthjulyan, and of the crafty device by which that peril was averted.

Young Wilkins came down last summer to fill a vacancy on the Gov'ment staff. He had only just finished serving his time on board ship, and this was his first berth ashore. A

handsome, free-and-easy young chap, fresh from sea, and suddenly set down within hailing distance of the prettiest bevy of maids in Cornwall—what more natural than that he should embark on a course of light-hearted, indiscriminate flirtation? That was well enough—contrary to all precedent, to be sure, but we had been young ourselves and could find excuses for him, even if our wives could not. As for the maids—well, one knows what maidens are, and one cannot expect them to be guided by political considerations when a likely young fellow is in question. So long, then, as he confined himself to light amorous banter, and an occasional romp ending up with impartial kisses all round, we looked on, benevolently neutral. But young Wilkins was not content to stop at that; or if he was, Jane Annie wasn't. Jane Annie's hair had only been put up since Easter; Jane Annie's womanhood was in its first, fresh, eager bloom; and consequently Jane Annie took herself—and young Wilkins—very seriously indeed. Gov'ment's brass buttons and plenteous white-wash dazzled Jane Annie's youthful eyes; Jane Annie conceived ambitions, and woman's native determination was not lacking to back them;

Jane Annie made a dead set at young Wilkins. With growing amazement, with deepening horror, we watched him being coaxed and driven from the broad road of universal gallantry down the dangerous, devious path that leads by way of stolen meetings and twilight whisperings to the brink of the black matrimonial gulf. Injudicious interference only precipitated the crisis; and the Sunday came when our amazed eyes beheld the melancholy spectacle of Town and Gov'ment, Jane Annie and young Wilkins, charming in white muslin and manly in blue serge, linked arm-a-crook in unnatural union, and walking up the road to chapel.

"A queer come-out," said our menfolk, and said no more, philosophers all. But our women were not inclined to dismiss the matter so lightly. Hear Maria the bakehouse woman, shrilly voluble in the midst of a whirling eddy of best bonnets. If report speaks true, Maria is not above a drop of run-down on the sly, and on Maria's kitchen mantelpiece lies a short grimy clay which is not the property of Maria's husband. So perhaps her public-spirited utterance owed some of its glow to a sense of private grievance.

"Eyah, my dears!—never heard tell o' no

s'ch thing in my life. A purty state o' things, sure 'nough! Shall marry into Gov'ment, shalt?—the bowld-face 'uzzy! Stout fisher-boys ben't good enough for 'e, ben't they? Set thy heart 'pon six brass buttons and a pail o' whitewash, hast? Going to do the come-over 'pon thy betters, hey? Here's tejousness, friends and neighbours all! How be us a-going to keep our little private saycrets, as don't consarn nobody but our own selfs, with this outrageous, onprincipled stir-a-coose chattering into Gov'ment's long ears all the while? Cast her off, neighbours; she's none o' we from this day. And you, Gov'ment!"—here Maria diverted her eloquence on the whitewashed buildings up the valley. "All these years you've been going about taxing us and stealing our firewood, and now that an't enough for 'e, but you must carr' off our innocent maids and set 'em to spy upon us. For that's what 'twill come to, friends; mark my words. From this day forth there won't be a pipe of 'bacca smoked in this town, but what Gov'ment'll know where 'twas got and what price paid for'm. From this day forth there won't be a pannikin of rum supped round the corner, but Gov'ment'll be muzzling his nose inside, asking questions

and kicking up a fuss. The sperit's in me, neighbours, and I prophesy; and the burden of my prophecy is this: the end of peace and the beginning of oppression, and the opsetting of all things gen'ral. R-rah! Down with Gov'ment!"

Maria the bakehouse woman only voiced the general sentiment in a slightly exaggerated form, and if it had not been Sunday the consequences might have been serious; for we are an excitable folk, and eloquence stirs us like the sound of warlike brass bands. Sunday duties gave us time to cool; Monday found us resolved to exhaust all the resources of diplomacy before proceeding to stronger measures. But, truth to tell, we have but small skill in the diplomatic art. It was a clumsy manœuvre to hoot young Wilkins in the street; it was even clumsier to set upon Jane Annie with threats and execrations till she wept from sheer rage. And I fail to see how we scored by constructing straw effigies of the two culprits and attempting to burn them on the cliffs after dark. The only result of *that* manœuvre was to bring Gov'ment down upon us for lighting illegal bonfires to the peril of traffic on the high seas. The rebuke did not

improve our tempers, you may be sure. Indignation meetings were held, treasonable talk was rife, and I tremble to think what might have happened had not Sam Jago stepped into the breach.

Now Sam, with his concise wit, his capacity for crafty scheming and infinite silence, is a born diplomat if you like. In this emergency, what does he do? He goes, as nobody else would have thought of going, straight to the hostile headquarters.

In his shirt-sleeves Sam Jago leans over the garden gate, puffing slow volleys of smoke into the calm face of the evening. Mark him well, that small, lean, bearded man with the twinkling eye. Menfolk and womenfolk pass to and fro before him; he nods to those and winks at these, but will not be seduced into conversation. Jane Annie bounces by, defiant; he heeds her not. Young Wilkins swings past, half arrogant, half sheepish; he makes no attempt to detain him. The stars peep forth; traffic slackens and ceases; still Sam Jago leans over his garden gate, till the night dews have robbed his shirt-sleeves of the last relic of their Sunday stiffness. Presently a hinge creaks up the

valley in the direction of Gov'ment Buildings, and Sam pricks his ears. A dark form comes slowly down the road; brass buttons gleam here and there upon it in the starlight; it is the chief officer, making his nightly round of inspection. Sam straightens himself out, shifts his pipe, and gives a soft hail.

"Evening, Mr. Moggridge!"

The chief officer halts, and shows a face seamed with worry. No occasion to bring him to the point; he begins on it at once.

"A pretty business this, Jago! Riotous assemblies, seditious cries, unlawful bonfires—a pretty business! Am I to report, or am I not? Whether I do or don't, headquarters is sure to get wind of it, and that means a reprimand. *Above all, no friction with the populace*—that's the word ever since the riot at Tregarry four years ago."

"That was a barr'l of spirits, wadn' 'a?" says Sam.

"Cigars. And cigars or spirits I shouldn't mind so much. But two young fools! How I'm to word a report I can't for the life of me see."

"Said anything to the young chap?" asks Sam.

"Not yet. But when I do——"

"Wouldn't, if I was you. Is the young chap's mind so terrible set on the maid, do 'e think?"

"Him! Didn't I catch 'im this very morning, kissing my own daughter behind my own back door?"

"Ah!" says Sam, and ruminates.

"Look now, Mr. Moggridge," he begins suddenly. "We'm foes, you and us. But in a friendly way, like—ha?"

The chief officer nods.

"Now look-see," continues Sam. "I speak plain. There's secrets; there's town secrets and there's Gov'ment secrets. 'Tis this way, I take it. 'Tidn' proper for we to know too much about *your* goings-on, and then agin you don't care to know more'n you're bound to about *our* goings-on. Idn' that so?"

Again the chief officer nods cautiously.

"Ways of pleasantness and paths of peace, ha?" pursues Sam. "And here come a young woman round the corner, and where's your peace and pleasantness? Gone in to once."

"Goodness knows, I've worry enough with the women as it is!" exclaims the chief officer.

"They're ten times more trouble than their husbands."

"That so? Have to put your foot down 'pon 'em pretty and often, I shouldn' wonder?"

The chief officer assents vigorously, and again Sam ruminates.

"Did 'e ever do any play-acting, Mr. Moggridge?" he asks presently.

"Why, yes," says the surprised chief officer. "Ship-board at Christmas time, you know. And no bad hand at it, so I was told else. But what of that?"

"Could 'e do a bit now, if 'twould quiet things down, like?"

"Trust me!"

"Well, then. P'raps you could get Mrs. Moggridge to ask the young woman up to tay one evening, just to make her acquaintance, she being about to jine the force, like. And then, while they'm a-setting there chatting, you might hap to come in, and——"

Here Sam's voice sinks, and it would be premature on my part to betray his whispered confidence. But this you may know, that as he goes on, the chief officer's brow slowly clears; he begins to chuckle, and finally, as Sam makes an end, he laughs aloud.

"I'll do it!" he exclaims, slapping his thigh. "What a chap you are, Jago! I'll do it to-morrow. Come up along o' me this minute, and we'll prime the missus."

Next day the invitation was delivered, and Jane Annie, clad in her best and brimming over with importance, went up to the white-washed villa. She was received by Mrs. Moggridge and her daughter, and they sat down to tea. Jane Annie was a bit nervous at first, and the talk was confined to society commonplaces. But soon Jane Annie gathered confidence before these two meek, subdued women. Jane Annie began to chatter volubly; Jane Annie began to laugh loudly. Suddenly Mrs. Moggridge raised a warning hand.

"Hush!" she whispered, and listened. "Ah!" she added, in a tone of relief. "'Tis all right. I thought I heard the master coming."

Jane Annie opened her eyes. The domestic life of Gov'ment is, as I have hinted, a sealed book to our womankind. Jane Annie saw the pages flip open, and had a glimpse of a tasty tale of domineering husbands and down-trodden wives. Jane Annie compressed her lips in scornful amusement.

"The master don't like loud talk," said Mrs. Moggridge, with a wan smile. "And loud talk he won't have, whether 'tis here or over to the Buildings. We're under orders, you see, my dear. There's drill for us as well as the men."

Jane Annie opened her eyes still wider. The tasty tale was developing a curious flavour—truth to tell, rather a forbidding flavour. Jane Annie, at a loss for words, let loose a shrill titter, which was abruptly checked as the door was flung violently open and Mr. Moggridge appeared, fuming. He threw himself into a chair.

"These women!" he growled. "They'll be the death of me. Aha, my dear!"—discovering Jane Annie—"glad to see you. We'll have a chat presently, when my temper's gone down. These women!"

"What have they been up to now, master?" asked Mrs. Moggridge, playing up to her cue.

"What haven't they been up to!" roared Mr. Moggridge. "Rank insubordination, right and left—that's what they've been up to! I've given them a dressing, though; ay, that I have—a regular up-and-down dressing!"

"Come now, master," said Mrs. Moggridge soothingly. "Drink your tea and tell us all about it."

"Ready for gossip and scandal, of course," said Mr. Moggridge pleasantly. "Well, since the girl's here, and 'twill help her to get a notion of her duties——"

"'Tis only proper she should," said Mrs. Moggridge, with a pitying sigh; and Jane Annie wriggled uneasily on her chair.

"Well then," said Mr. Moggridge. "Mrs James first, of course. That woman's the plague of my life. If I spent two minutes in her kitchen I spent twenty, teaching her to wash the baby as a Government baby should be washed. And what return do I get? Gratitude? Not a bit. Flat defiance of authority! Said she wasn't going to drown the cheeld, nor yet boil it, for all the Governments in the world. Bread and water's *her* fare for the rest of the week. What d'ye think o' that, my dear, for discipline?" he added, turning on Jane Annie.

Whatever Jane Annie may have thought, she was obviously incapable of giving it expression. Mr. Moggridge winked at his wife, and continued—

"Mrs. Hart next. I listen outside. Voices I hear—voices of females all talking at once, and the rattle of cups. 'Oho!' says I to myself, and fling the door open. What do I find? A tea-party, if you please, a regular sit-down tea-party; Mrs. Hart, Mrs. Tanner, Mrs. Cook, Mrs. Gribble, cups in hands, elbows on table, chattering away like gulls on a rock. 'Show your permit,' says I. None to show, of course. 'Unauthorised assembly,' says I. 'See regulations, rule fifteen, section three. Two days' confinement to kitchens all round.' That's my way, my dear," he added genially to Jane Annie. "Discipline, short and sharp. And do I ever hear a word of grumbling? No; they love me for it."

Jane Annie cast an affrighted glance on the door. Mr. Moggridge turned a chuckle into a cough, and resumed—

"Mrs. Figgis. I hear groans. In I go. Mrs. Figgis with her face tied up. Toothache? Oh dear no, says Mrs. Figgis, just a bit of a gumboil. But I know better; and when I look, it's a hollow grinder sure enough. She's coming up to-night to have it out, and out it shall come, though I break my wrist over the job. If there's anything Government's more

particular about than anything else, it's teeth. Teeth and morals, says Government, but teeth first and foremost. And by the way, my dear, since you are here, and there's no time like the present, suppose we get through that little formality. A modest, well-behaved maid as ever was, that I know; but I can't report on your ivories without a personal inspection. So come under the light, my dear, and open your mouth."

With an inviting grin on his face, he rose and bore down on Jane Annie. But on mature reflection Jane Annie had resolved to renounce her aspirations towards a Government alliance. She did not even wait to say good-bye. That very night young Wilkins received his dismissal, and peace brooded once more over Town and Gov'ment.

NED'S HOUSE

RECENT events in connection with Ned Rundle have served to recall to our memories an early episode in his career ; a small but momentous and instructive episode, which helps to explain why he remained a bachelor so long, and confirms, moreover, in a striking fashion, our deep conviction of the cantankerous unreasonableness of womankind. Woman's great aim in life, as our cynic philosopher, Sam Jago, acutely points out, is to get her man ; and in furtherance of this malignant design she displays a preterhuman ingenuity and cunning which reduces us to the condition of babes in her hands. Yet such is her flightiness, such her irrational inconsistency, that as often as not she is baulked of her prey by her own act, and we are saved on the brink of matrimony. Ned's case is a case in point.

Some fifteen years ago, when he was a young man of five-and-twenty, he went courting a maid,

as the customary but preposterous phrase goes; in plainer and more accurate speech, Sibyl Dunn fished for Ned and caught him, not without difficulty, for even at that time he was slow to kindle, and cautious beyond his years. Matters proceeded in the usual way; the dresser was bought, and the crockery to garnish it withal; a kitchen table was ordered at the carpenter's, and Ned picked up a stately flowery-faced grandfather clock at a sale up Polgoose way. Then, after some search, an eligible residence—or, if you prefer Sam Jago's caustic metaphor, a commodious rat-trap—was fixed upon; and finally things came to such a pass that Ned went off to market and returned with the ring—that aureate fetter which custom, with grim facetiousness, assigns to the captor in lieu of the captive. When Sibyl saw it she uttered a cry of delight, for Ned, with characteristic thoroughness, had chosen the most massive article in the shop.

"Cost me two pound," he said, as she turned it about and balanced it first in one palm and then in the other. "Plum and solid, edn'a? Won't wear out in a hurry, I reckon."

"Not in fifty year!" was Sibyl's ecstatic exclamation.

"And that's a terrible long time," mused Ned; whereupon Sibyl waxed sentimental.

"Aw, Ned dear, you'm right," she murmured. "'Tis very well to talk about fifty year, but life's oncertain. What would 'e do if you should lose your Sibyl? This handsome ring—p'raps I shan't be spared to wear en one single year, no, not six month, maybe; and then—aw, Ned!—what will 'e do then?"

Now, how was simple, inexperienced Ned to know that this was no genuine request for information, but simply one of the traditional moves in the game—the most hackneyed variant of the Maid's Gambit? How could fault be found with him for declining it, as chess-players say, and in all innocence of heart speaking the truth that was in him?

"Well, my dear," said he, "I thought upon that when I was a-buying of it. Thinks I to myself, two pound's a brave lot o' money, sure 'nough; but, after all, 'tis only once in a life-time. Better fit and get a good one while I'm about it, thinks I; and then, if anything *should* happen to Sibyl, 'twon't be wore down so much but what 'a 'll come in fitty for the next one, if next one there should hap to be."

I ask you, was not this delicately put?

Did it not show a rare prudence, a consummate foresight, such as should endear a man to any maid, if sense were in her? There was none in Sibyl. She flung the ring violently down at Ned's feet.

"Take en, Edward Rundle!" she exclaimed. "Take en, put en in pocket, and go sarch for the next one to once. 'Twill save 'e a deal of time and trouble, to say nothing of my burying expenses and the money for putting the banns up a second time. You'm too providential for me, and that's the truth. So fare 'e well, and wish 'e joy, you and your next one!"

So passes Sibyl Dunn from my story, like a puff of flighty, unsubstantial smoke, leaving Ned with his youthful faith in the sex hopelessly shattered, and his horror of rash enterprise—of all enterprise, change, or innovation whatever—enormously augmented.

Skip fifteen years, and find Ned at forty, living with his brother-in-law, Sam Jago, and slowly wearing his sister Amelia down with his fussy, obstinate ways. As Sam says, "The worst of old maids is an old bachelor;" and if Amelia ventured to change the position of the most inconspicuous ornament on the chimney-piece, it was at her peril.

Ned would come home from fishing and sit him down to a dish of tea. With the cup at his lips, his slow eye would revolve about the room, would hesitate, pass on, return, and stop dead. The cup would be set down with awful deliberation, and Amelia's fingers, eyelids, and lips would begin to twitch nervously. Ned's gaze would remain fixed while you might count fifty; then he would glance cautiously round, as if to make sure that he hadn't got into the wrong house by mistake; then the fixed glare would be resumed. Next you might observe him passing a doubtful hand over his brow, as who should say—"Do I dream?" Then, to a whispered accompaniment of—"Oh dear! Oh deary dear!" from poor frantic Amelia, he would set slow hands to the chair-arms, rise, and inspect the chimney-piece at close quarters from end to end. Not till then would he nod a short nod of terrible conviction, and turn upon the trembling culprit.

"Where's the chaney cat?" he would ask sternly. "The yaller one with the red spots and the left ear broke off. Where's it to?"

"I—I've put him in the parlour for a bit," Amelia would reply.

"How?"

"I thought 'twould be a change, like."

"Change!" Every revolting fibre of Ned's being would assist in the expulsion of the detestable word. "Change! What for do 'e want to change?"

"Aw, Ned, Ned!" Amelia would burst out. "'Tis very well for you to say that, being a man, and out and in all day and every day, now sea, now land, bad weather and good, nets, lines, and crab-pots, this, that and 'tother. *You* don't need to look for no change. *You* an't no stay-to-home woman, with the same old walls, and tables, and chairs, and cloam looking her stark in the face all the while, till she's sick o' the sight of 'em, and want to smash a plate or something, so's to make things lively and heartsome for a bit. *You* don't want no change; but aw, Ned, there's them that do!"

There would be a pause while this cloud of vain words filtered through to Ned's brain, and rose therefrom like a summer mist from a meadow, leaving as little trace behind. Then—

"Change!" he would repeat. "'Tis my belief you women won't be satisfied till Judgment Day do come, and the world's turned all upsy-down like a burley-cake!"

Then no word more from him, but a dropping fire of uneasy sighs, and eyes unwinkingly fixed on the vacant spot, till Amelia could bear it no longer, and the china cat would be fetched back from its retirement and replaced with a thump of exasperation. And Ned would rise once more, and shift it three-quarters of an inch along the shelf, so that the base exactly occupied the dust-marked circle of its former station; and returning to his seat, would remark—

“Now we’m comfor’ble agin. Change? I wouldn’ give a farden for your change. That’s Old Harry’s game, that is, going to and fro ’pon the earth like a flea in a blanket, upsotting things. In a Christian dwelling, now? No, no! No onnecessary change, if you plaise.”

As Sam was accustomed to remark, in his witty, fanciful way, “When Ned’s sick, send for the clockmaker, for Ned do go by wheels.” Not but what the two got on very well together, railing at the sex each in his own fashion, Sam in a rocket-shower of coruscating epigrams, Ned pounding away with his one heavy gun—“Women an’t no good; an’t worth a farden, women an’t, not a brass

farden"—until poor Amelia was driven well-nigh mazed between the two.

Such then was Ned at forty, a complete old bachelor, a confirmed misogynist and misoneist ; and such he promised to remain to the end, when suddenly a great Event splashed into the calm backwater of his existence. His aged maiden Aunt Elizabeth took ill and died, and when her will was opened, it was found that she had bequeathed the lease of her house to Ned himself—the last person in the world who had any conceivable use for it. What would he do with it? A swarm of barren conjectures buzzed for a season and died down, and we sat and watched Ned slowly swallowing this enormous innovation. The house itself was a tidy little affair—five rooms, garden, and outhouse, conveniently situated in the best quarter of Porthjulyan. Several young engaged couples began at once to cast envious eyes on it, and approached Ned with a view to negotiations. To these he returned no definite answer ; indeed, he was hardly accessible to human intercourse just then, dwelling in a kind of spiritual fog, through which his new possession loomed up, vague, immense, not to be envisaged in its

entirety without long and arduous effort. Some days elapsed from the reading of the will before he so much as set foot inside the house; and when, after long hovering, he ventured within, walking gingerly like a cat after the spring cleaning, he had not inspected more than two rooms before the outrageous novelty of his position came over him in a sudden flood, and he turned and fled back to Amelia's kitchen, where he sat gasping for a great space of time.

"No good," he was heard to murmur on recovery. "No good 'tall. Wouldn' give a farden for 'n. What's to be done by en I don't know."

However, Time the Reconciler passed a soothing hand over Ned's ruffled plumes. He passed by slow degrees from panic bewilderment to calm resignation, from resignation to a complacent sense of proprietorship. He began to make casual references to "my little house," and soon every spare moment was spent on the property. He took his own private chair over from Amelia's, and sat and smoked meditative pipes in every room by turn—"getting the feel of it," as he explained to inquirers. He spent long hours in bad

weather staring out of the upper windows, and discovering, as was conjectured from the speculative animation in his eye, a discreet and not unpleasing novelty in the appearance of land, sea, and sky as viewed from the new outlook. In short, Ned had been set fairly spinning down the ringing grooves of change, and we awaited fresh developments with amused curiosity.

We did not have long to wait. Presently came a report that Ned had been heard to say the house was dingy and wanted repainting. With miraculous rapidity another followed on its heels, that he had disinterred a forgotten barrel of paints from the back of his fish-cellar, and was making a regular rainbow of the place, inside and out. We hurried off to inspect, and found him disconsolate amid innumerable paint-pots, before a wonderfully variegated front door. The door-posts were creamy yellow, the jambs were apple-green, one panel was sky-blue, and the others were adorned with tentative dabs of well-nigh every hue one could give a name to. Ned had been experimenting, and couldn't for the life of him decide which colour he liked best. For be it noted as a warning to bachelors that long years of

moral sloth, with no wife at hand to spur him on and stir him up, had played havoc with his powers of spontaneous volition; in other words, when it came to making up his mind, there never was a more helpless chap. But his native obstinacy remained, and came to his rescue now. On proffering our advice, we were all found to be in agreement on one point, which was that sky-blue was the worst colour he could possibly choose, since every dirt-mark would infallibly show upon it. Ned's doubts were resolved in an instant. Sky-blue it should be, and sky-blue it was, until the front door and the window-sashes were painted. It was then that the vague rumour which associated these preparations with a bride unknown, grew circumstantial, and definitely fixed on Ellen Elizabeth Dawe. For why? Ellen Elizabeth was the only fair-haired maiden unpledged in all Porthjulyan, where we are a dark folk, and mostly *belong brown*, as we say. And of course, said Sam (the originator of the fable), the sky-blue decorations were meant to be complementary, so to speak, to her complexion; for what yellow-haired damsel would endure to parade her charms against, say, a crimson background?

That was enough for Ned. Straightway he began to cover the delicate blue with a coating of violent riotous orange, a colour no blonde beauty would venture within sight of.

"'Tis a cheerful colour," said he; "'most as good as a fire."

Perhaps that was one of his reasons for choosing it; for he had polished all the grates with Brunswick black until they were the shiniest, handsomest grates in all Porthjulyan; and so much did he admire their appearance, so deep was his horror of dust and litter, that he hadn't the heart to set a match to one of them. And since his spare time generally coincided with wet weather, the paint refused to dry unassisted, and his labour threatened to prove as unending as Tregagle's with his ropes of sand. Still he persevered, groaning and lamenting, but contemptuously rejecting all advice and assistance, until at last his task was completed, and the orange mansion flared like a winter-blooming furze-bush among the sober greys and modest greens of our little town.

What next? we wondered; and again we did not have long to wait. One fine morning Ned was seen to mount the 'bus and ride away

to St. Kenna. It was not the regular market day, the passengers were few, and there was little prospect of a heavy load returning. Judge then of our surprise when, about eight o'clock in the evening, the very hour when the 'bus was due back, there came a telegram from the driver, handed in at Poltriggan, four miles away, requisitioning an extra pair of horses. Such curiosity was aroused by this, that some of us clubbed our halfpennies together, and sent a prepaid telegram to ask the reason. The answer came—" *Ned's furniture*," and our wonder gave way to consuming laughter.

It was getting on for midnight when the 'bus at last arrived, but a good part of the town was on the spot to receive it. Ned in his holiday suit of solemn black, perched on the roof amidst a mighty pile of swaddled chairs, tables, and rolls of carpet, was welcomed with rapturous enthusiasm. Anybody who affords us amusement is bound to be popular in our little town, and Ned with his house was a regular pantomime, as the saying is.

Fifty willing hands assisted at the unloading, while Ned stood at the orange gate, lantern in hand, issuing directions, and reciting the dealer's

ornate description of each article, with candid comments of his own ; thus—

“ *Massive ma’ogny drawing-room sooet.* Edn’ so massive, nuther. The chairs do crake terrible when you set upon ’em.

“ *Quaint sideboard, richly carved, hartistic design.* No good. No polish up to ’m.

“ *Helegant brass and iron French bedstead.* No good ’tall—too wide for one and too narrer for two.

“ *New design Kidder carpet, wonderful wearing value.* Edn’ worth a farden, though—too dingy. Don’t know how I come to buy en.

“ *Tapestry carpet, all wool, art colours, dainty design.* Not so bad, this one. A showy li’ll carpet, sure ’nough.”

We also unloaded a Duchesse dressing-table, an assortment of brilliant little pictures, a syringe for streaming the windows, a warming-pan (this had a rousing reception), a complete battery of brooms and brushes, and other articles too numerous to mention. And we learned that another ’bus-load was to follow—stair-carpets, bedroom furniture, kitchen utensils, and I don’t know what else.

On the outskirts of the crowd Amelia Jago hovered weeping.

"He's mazed, sure!" she wailed to a would-be consoler. "And after I've done my best by en all these years, and nobody couldn' do no more, and all his money fleeting away like water, and what's going to do with house and furniture I don't know, for live inside of en 'a never can nor will, him that's so helpless as a baby, nor can't cook nor mend nor nothing, and such a' appetite that 'a wakes up three nights a week holl'ing for pasties."

"But edn' there a maid somewhere?" was asked. "He've got a maid in his eye, sure." We still clung to the only rational explanation of Ned's conduct.

"Don't I wish and pray there was!" cried Amelia. "But ask en, and he'll gruff upon 'e like a' old badger. 'A woman in my house?' he say. 'One o' these females slopping round, opsotting things and dropping things and taking things out and not putting of 'em back? Never while I do live!' he say. 'I'd ruther have a' I-talian monkey off a hurdy-gurdy!' he say. Aw, deary dear! He've gone clean mazed without a doubt."

There seemed to be no other solution. But when all the furniture was in—I pass over with briefest mention the episode of the ward-

robe, how it stuck on the stairs, how the banisters had to be sawn away, and how Ned stood by and shed the only tears of his adult life—when, I say, the furniture was in, and Ned held a regular quality At Home (for gentlemen only), and we had gazed and wondered at the downstairs rooms, and (those of us who cared to submit to Ned's inflexible regulation and take off our boots first) the upstairs rooms as well, and had been taken into the outhouse and made to note how every tool that could be hung up had its appointed nail, and every tool that couldn't its exactly ordained position on the shelves, and had admired the rigidly geometrical arrangement of the fuchsias and geraniums in the garden—then we frankly admitted that whatever Ned's mental condition might be, his house was a shining, blazing, extra-varnished credit to Porthjulyan.

Still we continued to wonder what he would do with it. He was content, we found, to do very little indeed. Without shifting his eating and sleeping quarters from Amelia's, he visited the house daily, and after airing and making the beds, checking the lawless aspirations of the fuchsias, and dusting and sweeping everywhere

with a thoroughness that the notablest housewife among us might well despair of emulating, he would sit down, now in this room and now in that, light his pipe, and give himself over to serene meditation. It was, so to speak, the swept and garnished cloister of his soul, the undisturbed, inviolate fortress of that shy Ideal which, in the case of most of us, has to take its chance amid a jostling crowd of coarse Realities. Here, with no change or fear of change to vex him, with all womankind inexorably denied admittance on any pretext whatsoever, he found that crystalline peace which is deemed the privilege of gods rather than of men. Without, he was the slave of time and mutability, and all the tumults and chances of this wavering world ; within, he shed all temporal shackles, and munched the lotus through a dateless and irrevoluble eternity.

A shame, you say, to disturb him. But we are a practical folk at Porthjulyan. Houses are scarce and hard to come at, and when we saw continually before our eyes such a commodious little residence as Ned's lying thus, week in, week out, in an exanimate trance (for what is a house without a kitchen fire but a dead, soulless thing?)—our amusement was

swallowed up in exasperation. Cloistral ideals are all very well, but fitter for Papishers than for good Wesleyans. A householder has his duties to fulfil towards the community; and according to our notions, the first requisites of good citizenship are a wife for the neighbours to gossip with and borrow flour and frying-pans from, and chubby children tumbling about the gate, and cheerful midday smoke curling up from the chimney. Here was a house, tenanted, yet untenanted, elaborately furnished to no purpose with chairs and tables that lacked a single convivial association, and with beds that had never been slept upon. The thing was unprecedented, uncanny; we didn't like it at all. The middle-aged bachelor is a rare fool among us; a middle-aged bachelor with a desirable residence attached was a glaring anomaly, not to be tolerated. With one accord we began plotting to drive poor Ned into the toils of matrimony. But that wary bird was not to be caught with the chaff we showered on his head, nor with the crumbs of sage advice we scattered at his feet. But for his own act—an act proceeding, curiously enough, from his extreme caution and foresight—Ned might have remained in solitary bliss to this hour.

We shall never forget the day when it was noised abroad that Ned was beginning to take an interest in the sex, and in the sex as represented by Tamsine Teague, of all people. If old bachelors are rare among us, old maids are rarer still; and Tamsine at thirty-five, neither ill-looking nor ill-tempered, and still unmarried, was as abnormal in her way as Ned himself. That these two odd ones were likely to make a match of it, seemed news too good, too artistically symmetrical, to be true. Yet the facts were there—Tamsine confined to her room with a bad attack of indigestion, brought on by over-indulgence in hot potato-cake; Ned calling daily—nay, twice, thrice a day—to inquire, with evident anxiety, after the progress of her malady; Ned urging Mrs. Teague to send for the doctor without delay, and hinting, in no obscure fashion, that the doctor's fee was ready in his own pocket; Ned arriving with a string of fresh-caught fish in one hand, and in the other a penny box of liver-pills, with which to coax and coerce the patient's appetite: facts portentous and unmistakable were here indeed. We struck the hot iron, and showered sparkling congratulations on the prospective groom. His look of blank amazement, his slow-gathering

wrath, his scornful, spluttering denials, all went for nothing, until Tamsine suddenly got well again, and Ned's interest in her disappeared as suddenly, leaving us in utter confusion and perplexity. Here was a riddle; who could solve it?

Who but the wise and crafty Sam Jago? Three silent pipes he smoked, sitting on the edge of his boat down beach; from the third he shook the ashes, stood up, twinkled round on us, and said softly—

“I have en. Had en by the tail just now; got en by the scruff now, sure 'nough. 'Tidn' Tamsine 'tall; 'tis the little house, nothing but that. Tamsine well and hearty an't no account; but Tamsine sick—'tis the little house in danger.”

We saw it at once, and wondered how we could have been so dense. But perhaps it may not be superfluous of me to explain the matter to you at greater length. When we lease a house at Porthjulyan, it is not for a definite term of years, but for the duration of the longest of three select lives; or, more accurately, the lease is for a nominal ninety-nine years, determinable (as the lawyers say) on the death of the last survivor of three persons nominated

in the document. And in the case of Ned's house, since Squire Tremellen was untimely dead, and Hubert Hunkin had not been heard of since he went off ten years ago to foreign parts, Ned's continued possession practically depended on the third life, which was Tamsine's own: a stout thread to all seeming, but one that capricious Fate might snap at any moment. Hence that anxiety, those delicate attentions.

We laughed for a week, or maybe for ten days; sedulously as we tend our jokes, the best of them will hardly keep their freshness longer; and then we let the matter drop. Not so Sam Jago. Sam saw his way to the killing of two plump birds with one stone—the perpetration of an excellent practical joke, and the putting a stop for good to Amelia's sisterly lamentations. A good, kindly woman was Amelia, but a little trying, even to a philosopher like Sam, with her perpetual flow of melancholy solicitude for Ned's welfare. Sam laid a scheme, brooded on it, hatched it out, and presently paraded a downy little chick of a plot for our inspection. We hailed it with rapturous approval.

"'Twill do very well with care," quoth Sam.
"But leave en to me. You chaps 'ud choke it

off with a lot of solid lies. It want careful handling and soft feeding, this little scheme do. Leave en to me."

So saying, he tucked it under his wing, so to speak, and went off to interview Tamsine. Now Tamsine had been really touched by Ned's attentions; in fact, the vague hopes they inspired had contributed not a little towards her speedy recovery, and his sudden defection was grieving her sorely. So her ear was open to the tempter, her bosom ready and warm to cherish the chick. That evening she took to her bed again, and you may be sure it was not long before the news was allowed to come to Ned's ears. Off he posted to the Teagues'. Tamsine's mother answered his peremptory knock, and shook her head when she saw him.

"She do seem bad this time, sure 'nough," said she.

"What have the woman been eating now?" exclaimed Ned vexedly. "I wish potatoes were a sovereign apiece, so I do!"

"'Tidn' indigestion this time," said Mrs. Teague gravely. "'Tis the heart, Ned Rundle."

Ned turned pale. "Heart disease!" he gasped. "My nerves! I'll go see for the doctor to once."

"'Tidn' no case for doctors, I seem," said Mrs. Teague, fetching an excellent sigh. "No, Ned; not if you fetched a dozen doctors, they couldn' do nothing by my poor Tamsine. '*Aw, my heart do ache!*' she say continual, and groan outrageous. Listen, and you'll hear her now through the planching. '*My heart do ache sore,*' she say. '*Aw, Ned, Ned!*' she say."

"W-what's that?" stammered Ned.

"'*Aw, Ned, Ned!*'" repeated Mrs. Teague. "Those are her words. And what she mean I can give a brave guess, and maybe so can others, Ned Rundle. I don't name no names, nor I don't say a word agin nobody; but when a man come prowling around after a sick maid, with his pills and his pilchers, and his '*How's the poor soul getting along?*' and his '*Anything I can do for the dear beauty?*' and his what you call delicate intentions, day in, day out; and then, when she get a bit better, that man go off without a word—why then, Ned Rundle, there's some would say that man haven' behaved as a' upright man do belong to behave."

"The woman's mad! Mad as a curley!" shouted Ned, between terror and indignation.

"Some do call it madness," remarked Mrs. Teague. "Some agin do call it by a softer name."

"And you'm mad too!" bawled Ned. "You'm all mad together! Such talk! Wouldn' give a farden for such talk!"

"Nor I nuther," agreed Mrs. Teague. "Talk an't no account, but actions do speak louder than words. And when a man come along with his pills and his pilchers——"

Ned fled.

We left him alone for a day or two, just to allow time for the idea to soak in. His groans, his fixed starings at nothing in particular, his reckless consumption of tobacco—none of your customary twenty slow puffs and pipe back in pocket, but a furious incessant Vesuvius of smoke and sparks—these things were the outward signs of a grievous inward conflict. He never went near Tamsine, nor dropped a question about her, but you may be sure that frequent bulletins from all quarters kept him well informed of the progress of her malady. And if reports were to be trusted, Tamsine was in a poor way, sure enough. Her pallor, her loss of appetite, her plaintive babble of cold tombstones and colder, stonier hearts, all pointed skeleton fingers in one sepulchral direction. Ned began to be seriously alarmed, and we to press our point with vigorous insistence.

"But the woman an't no good!" cried Ned at bay. "An't worth a farden, I tell 'e!"

"Ay, but the little house!" replied Sam. "That's worth a brave bagful of fardens, b'lieve. It look to me like you'm gwine to loss en, if you don't take she as well. Such a handsome house as 'tis, too, and the trouble you've took and the money you've spent by en! Well, it do seem a pity."

Ned's groan of anguish might have wrung compassion from the hardest heart, but we were flint and steel. He had no peace from us, afloat or ashore, until at last, out of sheer desperation, he began to approach the awful possibility of matrimony, much in the same spirit as that in which the possessor of an intolerably aching tooth approaches the dentist's door. Perhaps there was another motive. When all was said and done, here was a fine woman pining away for love of him; and all his prejudice could not steel him against the insidious flattery. In the midst of a vehement diatribe against the sex, he would suddenly pull up with—"Mind, I an't saying a word agin the poor female. 'Tis nothing but nature after all;" and he would cast a glance round on his massive furniture, with a peep by the

way, in the glass of the quaint sideboard, at his own no less massive proportions.

Sam judged that it was time to strike hard. He communicated with Tamsine, and within the hour Ned was given to understand that the poor maid had temporarily rallied, and had expressed an earnest desire to gaze on the famed glories of Ned's house, just once, before it was too late. Even then he jibbed. His whole being revolted against the sacrilegious notion, and it was not until we had coaxed and threatened, had appealed to his humanity, and impressed upon him the desperate and singular nature of the case, the urgent necessity of humouring the invalid, and the grave responsibility a refusal might entail, that he growled out a ferocious and reluctant surrender.

That afternoon Tamsine Teague, carefully wrapped in shawls, and supported by her mother and Sam, arrived at the door, where they were met by the pale and miserable Ned. Mrs. Teague, who in her prophetic soul was already a mother-in-law, with all the rights and privileges appertaining, smiled an affable greeting, set her foot within, and made as if to enter. Ned held up his hand.

"No," he said firmly. "One woman's one too many, though if 'tis to be, why, 'tis. But not two of 'e. I don't care a farden which one 'tis, and that's the truth; but only one at a time, if you please."

Mrs. Teague retired baffled, with an expression on her face that was calculated to make any son-in-law shiver. Sam began to follow her, only to be called back by a cry of desperate appeal.

"Sam Jago! Your own brother by marriage! You an't going to sheer off and desert him!"

Sam winked at us—we had already begun to gather casually about the gate—and entered the house on Tamsine's heels. It was from his lips that we learned what happened inside.

To begin with, although it was as fine and dry a day as you could wish for, Tamsine spent a full minute in rubbing and scraping her boots on the mat. Sam had an eye on Ned during the ceremony, and professes to have detected a very perceptible softening of his features.

"What I say is this," remarked Tamsine, rather out of breath after her final double shuffle. "If there an't no muck took *into* a

house, why, there won't be no muck to take *out* of a house."

"Azackly," grunted Ned, not ungraciously. "What I always say myself. Step inside, will 'e?" he added, achieving the unaccustomed politeness almost without an effort.

Confronted with the sober magnificence of the parlour, Tamsine lifted hands and eyes in a mute ecstasy of admiration that was not without its effect on her host.

"How don't 'e set down?" he growled, and Tamsine turned a tender, grateful glance on him, and sank into a chair. She looked about her, punctuating her examination with little sighs of wistful delight, till her eyes rested on a duster lying in a heap on the table, where Ned had hurriedly thrown it when the summons to the door interrupted his daily task. She jumped to her feet.

"I like to see things left *tidy* myself," she said, with gentle severity, and began to fold the duster up. Ned's face, as we gathered from Sam, was a study in conflicting emotions. Wrathful indignation at feminine presumption battled with shame at the implied rebuke to his housewifery, while deep down below the surface began to glow and bubble the uneasy

rapture of him who at last discovers his kindred spirit, his unlooked-for, unhopèd-for Twin Soul.

Having folded the duster and carefully smoothed out its every crease and wrinkle, Tamsine was about to put it away in the middle drawer of the quaint sideboard, when she started, peered, shook out the folds again, and began to wipe invisible dust from the recesses of the rich carvings.

"I'm making a bit free, you'll say," she remarked over her shoulder to Ned; "but when I see dirt, my fingers do ache to get at en. And this twiddly kind of furniture do catch the dust terrible, don't 'a?"

"Ah, it do that!" sighed Ned, touched to the heart by this shrewd stroke. "The trouble that sideboard give me you wouldn' believe," he added confidentially.

'Not but what you've done very well by en—for a man," said Tamsine; and Ned sat up with a sudden jerk, and remained bolt upright, his mouth half open, his fascinated eyes following the neat, plump little woman as she moved softly about the room, flicking the duster here, adjusting an ornament there, and now and again making some brief, pregnant remark, such as—

"You've been using furniture polish, I see. 'Tis a mistake. It look handsome for a bit, but the spirit do soon go out of it, and it's bound to gather dust, such sticky stuff as 'tis. Try a soft dry rag, Ned Rundle. It'll polish as bright, and the sheen do last longer."

"Hear that, Ned?" muttered Sam, improving the occasion. "The woman do know a thing or two after all, eh?"

To which Ned returned a solemn nod. He was too deeply moved, too much absorbed in readjusting his conception of the universe, to utter a single word. His pride was humbled, his boasted skill in housewifery impugned, corrected, made nothing of—and by a mere woman too. To judge by his looks, he did not find the sensation of abasement altogether a disagreeable one. Something like admiration, something warmer even than admiration, came into his eyes as he watched Tamsine flitting here and there, pausing, putting her head on one side, darting swiftly and unerringly on some infinitesimal speck of dust, for all the world like a busy, bright-eyed, silent robin. For the first time in fifteen years Nature had been given her chance with Ned, and Nature was making the most of it.

Tamsine finished her self-imposed task, folded the duster again, and put it away. Then she sat down, a little flushed, but none the less comely for that, and surveyed her handiwork.

"'Twill do very well now, 'a b'lieve," she said, and trilled a pleasant little laugh, and glanced at Ned, who was still staring with mouth ajar. A long silence followed. Sam nudged Ned.

"Anything to say to the maiden?" he suggested.

Ned started, collected himself, and said huskily—

"You'm looking healthier than you was, Tamsine."

Tamsine coloured with mingled pleasure and guilt.

"Work's good for a lone woman," she said, with the tiniest sigh. "It shift the ache from her heart to her legs."

Whether Ned saw the opening or not, he took no advantage of it. He only cleared a very dry throat once or twice, and relapsed into glowering silence. Sam frowned and nodded at Tamsine, giving her to understand that this was no time or place for subtle manœuvres; with a man like Ned the attack

must be direct, frontal, unmistakable. Tamsine began to gather her shawl about her.

"Well, Ned Rundle," she said, "I thank 'e hearty for leaving me have a glimp at your house. Such a house I never see before, nor I an't likely to see agin, not if I live to be a hundred, which I hope I may for your sake, Ned, though I fear I an't quite so long as that for this world." She paused, coughed a churchyard cough, and continued—

"It do seem queer, don't 'a?—you and me and the house being bound up together, like, and yet the three of us never come together before this hour, nor never will agin, most likely."

Another opening. Ned saw it, advanced towards it on tiptoe, so to speak, and retired hurriedly, moistening the lips that refused to do their office. Tamsine gave a little shrug, exchanged comical glances with Sam, and tried once more.

"There an't a woman in the town, Ned, but what's aching to hear what I've got to tell 'em. And jealous! La! I shall hold up my head some, I can tell 'e, after this. But I shan't tell 'em nothing. 'No,' says I, 'Ned Rundle don't want a passel o' women chattering about

his chairs and tittle-tattling about his tables,' says I. 'But I will say this,' says I, 'there an't a maid among 'e, nor a married woman nuther, but what she'd be proud to have the dusting of such stately furniture and the sweeping of such noble carpets. And if 'twas mine,' says I—but la! what *am* I a-telling of? "

She pulled up in well-acted confusion, and hid her mingled laugh and blush with the prettiest gesture imaginable. Ned's eyes grew bigger and rounder than ever; he gasped like a dying cod; he bobbed his head forth and back like an alarmed chicken; he fumbled wildly for his handkerchief, snatched it out, blew a summoning bugle-call to his courage, and spoke—

"'Tis at your sarvice."

"Plaise?" said Tamsine; for Ned's voice was unintelligibly thick with emotion, and further impeded by the folds of the handkerchief.

"'Tis at your sarvice, I say," he repeated, desperately loud and bold.

"I—don't—onderstand," murmured the lady coyly.

"'Tis at your sarvice," snapped Ned for the third time. "Take it or leave it. Shan't say it agin. Shan't say no more."

"No occasion to say no more," remarked Sam benevolently. "Without 'tis what I'm a-going to say; and that's what they say in the story-books, when the barrinet have scat his brain abroad, and Lady Jenny and Vice-count Jacky are down 'pon their marrow-bones before the old earl in the white weskit. ' Bless 'e, my cheldern,' says the old bloke, and so say I."

And so saying, he tactfully turned his back on the young couple, stepped to the window, and published the news by blowing us an airy, fantastical kiss. We shouted, and Sam slipped out to join us and give us details. He is the happy possessor of a vivid imagination. I don't know whether he drew upon it for the picture he drew us of Tamsine perched cooing on Ned's knee with her arms wreathed about his neck, and Ned looking as if he was thoroughly enjoying the situation in his solemn way; but I do know that they were married last Christmas.

Happily married?—you ask. Well, I shall never forget the pride, the gusto, with which Ned informed us, a week or two after the ceremony, that Tamsine had absolutely forbidden him to smoke his dirty pipe anywhere indoors—

even in the washhouse ; and it is a fact on which he loves to dwell, that his slippers always await him in the front porch, and as the heathen Turks do, so must Ned—take off his boots before entering his own house. I have heard of men being hoist with their own petard ; I have heard of men being set to stew in their own juice ; but never before did I hear of a man who referred to an experience of either kind as a reason for legitimate self-congratulation, as Ned Rundle does.

FANNY AND CORNELIUS

MODESTY and truthfulness alike forbid me to claim high rank for our little town as a centre of culture, but you must not suppose that the polite arts are altogether unknown to us. Brutes indeed should we be if this were so. Bessie's Tom's sweeping dictum—"Story-books is foolishness, pickshers is plum foolishness, and as for music, 'tis the plumpest foolishness of all"—was uttered in the heat of argument, and he would be the first to qualify it largely in his calmer moments. As a matter of fact, we are ardent students of literature, keen critics of pictures, and devoted enthusiasts for that art of arts, music. For solid reading, well-nigh every house possesses copies of *Valentine Vox* and Foxe's *Martyrs*, and the 'bus scarcely ever returns from St. Kenna market without at least one of those penny stories which are the chosen solace of our lighter moments. A little bit of love, a little bit of

adventure, and a little bit of religion—such are the ingredients we look for in the literary dish; and the penny stories in the pink covers provide them in a variety of cunning blends. Nor are we altogether without literary associations of our own. James-over-to-shop once composed a handbill for the advertisement of a surplus stock of fly-blown gown-stuffs, which was much admired by us all, besides numbering good intellects up to Churchtown. And we think we ought to be allowed a kind of vicarious participation in the literary fame of a certain young man who came down among us one summer, was made free of our club, attended many meetings, and went off and wrote a tale in which all our principal members figured and many of our choicest yarns were embodied. Penticost didn't like it at all; for the young man, who for some unknown reason called us all out of our names, chose to dub him Zerubbabel, "which may be Scripture," he complained, "but 'tedn' pretty, beside making me feel like I was somebody else." But the rest of us were proud to see ourselves in print.

With pictures we are well supplied, thanks to the keen competition among the St. Kenna

grocers, who rain their rival chromos on us every Christmas. Nor are we without some native skill in the graphic arts, as every cellar-door bears ample witness. Scarce one of us but has contributed at some time or other to the adornment of the walls of our club, which are covered with portraits of Penticost in all manner of ignominious situations. They may not be highly finished, those portraits, but their rude vigour is undeniable, and they are instantly recognisable *as* portraits by the conspicuously brandished hammer. And at the Land and Sea Thanksgiving up to chapel, one year when fish was scarce, a gigantic mock turbot, ingeniously plaited by Jan Tripp out of wheat-straws, was much commended by competent judges, not only as a work of art of unique character, but as an adroit and economical tribute to earth and ocean at once.

Even if we be not allowed to shine as artists, yet here, as in the case of literature, we are at least the fertile cause of art in others. Many a stately picture has been painted off on our beach; many a heap of fresh-caught fish has been preserved in oil to future generations; and Bessie's Tom, hauling crab-pots, mending crab-pots, marching up the beach festooned

with crab-pots, is known by sight to thousands he never set eyes on, and is, I fear, credited by them with a consuming appetite for hard work to which he lays no claim.

But our chosen art is music, and here we may modestly claim to excel. Ours are the euphonium, the piccolo, and the bass drum of Polgoose brass band. Ours are five harmoniums, accordions and jew's-harps without number, and a piano; but this last is for show rather than use, since the keys are apt to fall to dust when you touch them, and all the wires are broken. Nancy Dawe owns it. She was attending a sale one day, with her eye on a pair of real imitation alabaster vases, when the piano was put up. The auctioneer's suggestion of five shillings as a reasonable starting price met with no response. His urgent appeals moved Nancy to pity. "Only wants to be set going," thought she. "I'll start en, so I will;" and in her kindly concern she bid five-and-six. The precipitate fall of the hammer brought tears of dismay into her eyes, and the vases passed into alien hands; but the piano makes an even genteeler ornament for her best room, and procures her much consideration among strangers.

Ours too is the chapel choir, whose *fortissimo*

once broke two lamp-shades. Ours is Fiddler Harry, who is equally skilful on the violin, the clarionet, and the bass-viol; which last he especially affects in the winter season, when brisk exercise is even more desirable than sweet sounds. And ours lastly was—alas, that I cannot write *is*!—Benjie Dunstone, chief among sacred harmonists. And so to my story.

Benjie Dunstone was an old man when he said good-bye to our little town, and for more years than most of us can remember he had been in charge of the harmonium up to chapel. A just man and a masterful, he filled that exacting position to the satisfaction of all. He chose the hymns with tact and judgment, his tread was firm on the bellows, and he was capable of a *fortissimo* that fairly lifted you off your feet, being a man of singularly muscular calves for his age; as you are doubtless aware, it is the legs that count for most in harmonium-playing. He ruled the choir at practice with a rod of iron: no small achievement, let me tell you: fit to command armies is the man who can enforce order and obedience at a choir-practice, what with giggling sopranos who pop unseasonable acid-drops into their mouths at the moment

when a clear and unimpeded top-note is called for, and bewildered altos for ever straying into their neighbours' preserves, and aspiring tenors who *will* hold on to their best note right across between the verses, and jealous basses, each one bent on outgrowing the rest, to the utter subversion of all expression-marks.

As for Benjie's musical qualifications, it is believed that the man could do simply what he liked with a tune—turn *Old Hundred* into a jig, if he'd a mind to. There wasn't a stave in the hymn-book but he could play it off by heart from beginning to end—ay, and backwards from end to beginning, I shouldn't wonder, if he had cared to try; which he didn't, being a sober, God-fearing man, the last to interfere with the established order of things. Once only did he depart therefrom. That was when he made up an entirely new tune to "Peace in the Valley"—made it up out of his own head and wrote it out fairly with his own hand, in four parts all complete. It was quite a different tune from the natural one, yet it fitted the words with a marvellous exactitude. We never sang that tune in public, it is true, because the old associations of the familiar words would come cropping up in our minds, so that after starting fair, voices

would begin to drift away at the first bar of the second line, and the verse would end in lamentable confusion. But that was our fault, and did not detract from the credit of Benjie's achievement. You may be sure the old man was uncommonly proud of his musical bantling ; and he named it *Porthjulyan*, in honour of our town.

Twice a year, at Land and Sea Thanksgiving and at Christmas, Benjie steered us successfully through an anthem, without hitch or breakdown ; which is more than parson's daughter up to Churchtown ever managed to do, and she has a grown man, artfully concealed behind a curtain, hard at work all the while supplying her with wind. Benjie pulled us through single-handed. With his eyes upon us we dared not break down, and his eyes seemed to be upon us all the while. Treble, alto, tenor, bass—four pair of eyes had Benjie, and one over for the soloist. The very sight of him inspired enthusiasm, with his fingers like lightning over the keys, his whole frame swaying from side to side as he pounded away at the bellows, and his face all afire with the music, and growing ruddier every moment with excitement and exercise combined.

But Benjie left us. It was a sad wrench for

him, and for everybody. The Sunday night on which he made his last appearance at the harmonium dwells in our memories yet. It was his habit to start a tune after the last prayer, just to play us out; but that night he couldn't have played us out if he had gone on till daybreak. Everybody sat fast, to hear and see the last of Benjie at the harmonium. He played some little tune through, with his eyes on the keys all the while. When he looked up at the end, there sat the whole congregation looking soft upon him; for there wasn't a soul among us but was fond of the masterful old man, and proud of him too. At first he stared blankly at us; he had been so wrapped up in music and sad thoughts that he never noticed our extraordinary stillness. Then he understood, and began playing again—didn't seem to know what to play at first, but fumbled away with the chords, up top, down below, first this key and then that. Then, what should he do but start on *Porthjulyan*, his own tune, and play it through three times? The first time it was neither loud nor soft, bold nor tender, but just as if he were stating the plain facts of the case. You could fancy him saying—

“Here sit I, Benjie Dunstone, where I've sat

these forty years ; and here's my little tune that I made myself, and to tell 'e the truth I'm rather proud of the same, though I don't want to boast or make a fuss."

Next time it was out with all the stops, bellows going full speed, and cold water trickling down every back. That was—

" Music ! Here's to music ! A wonderful thing is music, friends all. It opens hearts out, and joins hearts together in praise and loving-kindness. In the grief of parting, in all manner of trouble, no matter what it is, music's the best comforter, I find." Some such words were always in Benjie's mouth, and now the music said them for him.

The last time, in went all the stops but three, the soft ones at either end of the row, and that other stop which makes no sound of itself, but sets a kind of whirligig going in the vitals of the machine, so that the music comes out all soft and trembly, like a maid saying something tender and trying hard not to cry all the while. And now he played so softly, that when one of Maria the bakehouse woman's hairpins worked its way out of Maria's back hair and fell with a tiny tinkle on the stones, every ear in chapel heard it ; and not a lip quivered, though Maria's

habit of shedding her hairpins under the stress of emotion is a standing joke among us. The meaning this time was plain.

"Good-bye," said the music. "'Tis grief to leave 'e. Make what you will of it, parting's a terrible sad old tune, and we won't pretend it isn't. It's not for Cornishmen to stuffle up their feelings as if they were ashamed of them. Good-bye, and wish 'e well, one and all."

The last chord you could hardly hear at all. Some who were at the back declare to this day that, by a supreme touch of artistry, Benjie never played it. But played it was for all that; and then Benjie got off his stool, and quietly, in the most matter-of-fact way, fetched the key out of his waistcoat pocket, shut down the lid, and made all fast. Then he went to drop the key back in pocket, remembered, twisted an odd grin on his hard old face, and laid it instead on the top of the harmonium. Everybody stood up to him as he marched stoutly down the chapel, and everybody—but really it is no concern of yours who blew his nose and who piped her eye; nor indeed am I so skilful as Benjie in the manipulation of that trembly stop. Benjie left us, and we were uncommonly sorry to lose him: that is enough said.

But my story is only just beginning. We had to choose his successor ; a big task, as you will admit ; Benjies do not grow on every furze-bush. We did our best, and things turned out well enough in the end ; but perhaps it is not so wonderful that the business was terribly bungled in the doing.

To begin with, our best remaining musician was entirely out of the question. Harry the Fiddler is as great in his way as Benjie himself, and infinitely more versatile. We frankly admit that he has more music in his little finger than the rest of us have in all our bodies. 'Tis in the blood, you see ; his father was Harry the Fiddler before him, and his grandfather Crowding Harry. With horsehair and catgut he can make us laugh and weep at will ; when he scrapes, all must dance ; what he tootles to-day, that we whistle to-morrow ; in a word, he has a genius for carnal melodies. But his idle vagabond ways unfit him for ecclesiastical preferment, and, moreover, he professes heartily to despise our harmonium, speaking impious words against it, and declaring that when all's said and done 'tis little better than a hurdy-gurdy. It gives him grievous

pain inside, says Harry, to see a great hulking man thumping and stamping the heart out of a tender tune. When it's a matter of quick music, he is put in mind of an elephant he once saw at a fair, trying to dance a courant. When you play a tune on the fiddle, says Harry, it goes straight from the heart of you, through your finger-tips into the trembling of the strings, and so out upon the world. Man and fiddle are one; every note you make for yourself, fresh and fresh; the very shape of the thing takes the eye, like the shape of a fitty maid. Whereas, when you play the harmonium, you are tackling an ugly square box of machinery; and you can't put a spirit into machinery, try as you may. Moreover, the same stale old notes have to serve time after time until they are worn out. Any one with a finger and a foot can sound a note in tune on the harmonium, says Harry; but let them try the same on fiddle or bass-viol: that will show.

Well, we had a few tolerable performers beside, who could manage at a pinch to shuffle through a plain familiar tune; but everybody knew that our final choice must rest between two candidates. If Benjie had left us a little sooner, matters would have been simplified still

further, and Cornelius Johns elected without debate or delay. For some years Cornelius had been Benjie's pupil and acting deputy. He was a steady, estimable young man, not another Benjie by any means, but one who made up by serious application for the natural genius he lacked—the sort of young man you could be dependent on, as we say. Everybody had always looked forward to seeing him step into his master's place when the time should come.

So matters rested until Benjie's departure began to occupy us. Then Fanny Worth suddenly entered on the scene—Farmer Worth's spoiled and petted only daughter, returning from boarding-school for the last time, with her hair newly done up and all the graces and accomplishments thick and fresh upon her, turning the heads of our young men with her pretty face and quality ways, and stirring the hearts of our maidens to envy and uncharitableness with an endless succession of smart new dresses. There wasn't a quality accomplishment that Fanny couldn't touch off to the nines. She could paint pictures off by hand, she knew all the books, she could pallyvouze better than any Frenchman, and as for her harmonium-playing,

I don't believe there was a duchess in the land fit to stand in sight of her in that respect. If quick fingers said the last word, Benjie himself would have to give in to her, as he admitted, with an apologetic glance at his knotted, horny hands. And here was Farmer Worth, a man of substance and standing, a shining light at the chapel, and a chief supporter of its funds, roundly declaring that his Fan was going to take Benjie's place, or he would know the reason why. Opposition was aroused by this. We are a proud-spirited folk, and hate to be dictated to. But Farmer Worth was not to be ignored, and Justice had her claims; the matter was one to decide without fear or favour, and without fear or favour we were resolved to decide it. When I say "we" in connection with an affair of such magnitude, it is needless to explain that I mean Penticost's.

It was a wet night when the subject was broached, and Penticost's was crowded considerably beyond its utmost capacity. The cream of Porthjulyan's intellect was gathered there in a clotted heap. Of course both Bessie's Tom and James-over-to-shop were present, Tom on his accustomed perch among the bristles and wax-ends at the corner of the table nearest the

door, and James, who came in late, occupying the only space left vacant for him, which was the lozenge-shaped space between Tom's outstretched knees. In our midst our meek little host sat invisible on his low stool, now tapping away like a woodpecker in a dense forest, and anon throwing down his hammer in despair and plaintively soliciting more room for his pinioned elbows.

The early part of the discussion was random and desultory, and I can recall no more of it than Sam Jago's humorous suggestion that here was a seasonable opportunity of discarding the harmonium altogether, and substituting a proper organ, one with a handle—"so's us old ones can have a turn now and agin." But presently it resolved itself, as our discussions are apt to do, into a heated passage-at-arms between our two giants of debate. Seated as they were, with James in Tom's lap—and because of the crowd neither could budge—the duel presented a curious outward aspect, Tom storming away at the back of James's head, and James volleying retorts over either shoulder in turn, like a dog snapping at flies of a summer afternoon. They approached the matter on its political, rather than its æsthetic side; and

since James began with an enunciation of the conservative view, which favoured Cornelius Johns, and a man at the hellum, and none of your purse-proud dictators, and none of your new-fangled boarding-school tricks and fireworks, Bessie's Tom naturally stood up for the party of innovation—Fanny Worth, and a maid's as good as a man, and a pretty maid's a bit better, and none of your vested interests, and time we had a new harmonium, and no occasion to offend fond fathers with plenty of cash. Tom, being lean and long-winded, was soon overwhelming the stout and puffy James; when the latter, to avoid utter defeat, gave the discussion a sudden turn.

“That's very well,” he said, screwing himself round and fixing Tom with half an eye. “Argyment's very well at a particular time, but that time an't this time. I'll give 'e an insight. Here's two skiffie-boats, yourn and mine. I say mine's the smartest; you say yourn's the smartest. Very well. What's the use of argyment there? Argyfy till the cows come home, you won't settle nothing. What then? Why, down beach with 'e, shove off, hoise sail, and a course to wind'ard and a course to lew'ard, and leave the best boat win. And so for this here

business. It look to me like the best way's to pitch one of these competitions they'm a-telling of. Here's Cornelius and here's Fanny, like it might be my skiffie-boat and your skiffie-boat, if you onderstand. Well, then ; set 'em a piece to play, like setting 'em a course to steer ; and the one that steer the harmonium the smartest, hand over the key to en, like it might be the prize—see ? ”

When we had successfully disentangled harmonium from skiffie-boat, we agreed that the notion was an excellent one. It appealed to our sporting instincts, it destroyed all possibility of underhand intrigue, and it gave fair promise of some fun and excitement, things that are sadly to seek with us in the dull winter months. We resolved ourselves into a committee, and proceeded to discuss the matter in all its bearings. The results of our deliberations were as follows :—

The competition was to take place in the chapel, of course, and the voting in the schoolroom underneath. Every full-blown chapel-member was to have a vote, without distinction of sex. Sam Jago's objection—“ Give Jenny a vote ? You might so well give her a loaded gun to once ! ”—was overruled,

with what wisdom you will see later. The competitors were not to be present at the voting, which was to be by show of hands. After it was over, the two were to be called in, and the key, the symbol of office, was to be formally presented to the successful candidate.

All this being satisfactorily settled, a difficult question arose. What was to be the subject of competition? What piece were we to set them to play? Hymn-tunes were promptly barred out, as being too easy and commonplace. Secular music was out of the question, of course. "Vital Spark," our favourite burial anthem, had its advocates, as a tasty little ballad with some twisty bits in it; but its funereal associations were held to disqualify it. A more festive note seemed called for. All were at a loss, when Penticost piped up with a suggestion.

"I'm towld," he said, "that there's a piece they call the Hallelujah Cooress, that's considered the tip-top piece of all. There edn' a piece, so they tell me, that's so much thought of up to London. Seeming to me, if we could get hold of that piece——"

"That's the piece!" exclaimed Bessie's Tom. "Hallelujah Cooress—that's av 'um!

I've seen it highly spoken of 'pon the paper many a time. *The Celebrated Hallelujah Cooress*—I mind it on the paper."

"Ess," said James-over-to-shop, "and, seem 'me, I've heard en too. Look-see, Peter Peter, didn' the band play that very piece up to flower-show last summer?"

"That's so," said Peter Peter. He spoke with authority, for he it is who plays the euphonium in that selfsame band. Nightly he practises his part by the open window of an upper chamber, and nightly we pleasantly speculate what gay tune it may be of which those slow grunts are the foundation. "That's so," said Peter. "I mind it well. Some of the maids started dancing to en, and up come the parson, and a terrible to-do, I can tell 'e. Ess, that's the piece. Take some playing too, that piece do—a sweaty, slap-dash stave, sure enough. What I call a two-noggin piece," said Peter, who measures his art with a pint-pot, according to the amount of subsequent lubrication his throat requires.

"See?" cried Penticost, highly delighted. "See? There 'tis! A tough melody, b'lieve. Just the thing, I should say, to sarch out better from good."

"We'll get en, my dears!" declared Bessie's Tom. "To-morrow, if we do live and all's well, we'll have en down by the 'bus."

Gems from Handel was the name of the volume that the 'bus brought us next evening, and I must confess that at first we were a bit gravelled by this cryptic title, which seemed to have no possible connection with the matter in hand. But on investigation we found that "Handel" had nothing to do with hurdy-gurdies, as we had feared, but was the name of the concocter, the man who put the music together; and Tom's keen intellect soon discovered that "Gems" was merely metaphorical, and stood for valuable melodies—tip-top staves, sure enough. And when we opened the book, there was our chosen piece on the very first page.

"I towld 'e so!" cried the elated Penticost. "Hallelujah Cooress!—there 'tis in the front place of all. That shows!"

"A tough stave, didn' I say so?" remarked Peter Peter. "Look to all they little black notes with the two tails up to them. I know them; 'tis like catching a hatful of fleas when you get among they little black notes. One at a time 's enough for me in my small way, I know that; but here 'tis snatch up two handfuls

at every whip and turn. Look abeam o' my finger—four, five, six at one stroke. Ess, a tough job, I should say. Don't know what Cornelius 'll make of it."

That made us debate whether either candidate was to be allowed a preliminary inspection and trial. We decided in the negative. The contest was to be as strict and fair as we could make it, and if practising were allowed, Cornelius, with his fishing to attend to, would be at a disadvantage against the leisured Fanny. So Tom buttoned the Gems up safely inside his coat, and went off to put them under lock and key against the hour of trial.

Meanwhile the matter had got abroad, and all the world was discussing our plan. The general sentiment was favourable. Party feeling had already begun to run high; bad blood was being engendered between the Cornelians and the Fanatics; and the scheme we proposed was welcomed with relief, as offering an unexceptionable solution of a very delicate difficulty. But what of the two most interested parties? Fanny Worth laughed, tossed her pretty head, and declared herself willing to undergo any test we cared to impose. But the behaviour of Cornelius was unexpected,

and, at the time, inexplicable. He turned very red, mumbled unintelligibly, and finally came out with a flat refusal. We expostulated. Did he see that this was tantamount to a definite withdrawal of his candidacy? Yes, he did; and he wasn't much caring, either; his mind was not so much set on the matter as it had been; he didn't wish to stand in anybody's light; and, in short, if the maid wanted the post, she was heartily welcome to it, so far as he was concerned. And perhaps we wouldn't mind telling her so, with his compliments.

This, we felt, would never do. It upset all our elaborate arrangements, and cheated us of the prospect of an evening's entertainment. We argued, flattered, cried shame, but all to no purpose. Cornelius was immovable. We went off in despair to notify Fanny. Fanny laughed again, tossed her head once more, and remarked that it was easy giving away what you hadn't got, and *Thank-you for nothing* was her message to Cornelius, and the chap was afraid, surely. She didn't think much of cowards and skulkers, either; they were not the sort of young men she wished to have dealings with. In fact, it was in her mind to despise Cornelius

heartily, and we might tell him so, with *her* compliments.

This being faithfully reported to Cornelius, he turned redder than before, mumbled worse than ever, and then, suddenly setting his teeth and flinging back his head, withdrew his resignation, and announced himself determined to go in and win ; though he didn't care a straw what an uppish flirtingill of a maid said or thought of him. We applauded his resolution, and clinched matters by fixing the date of the contest there and then.

The night came ; the chapel was crowded. None but members were allowed within the building, and hardly a member was absent ; while a dense mob of Bible Christians and Episcopalians thronged the purlieus, there to await our verdict, and meanwhile to pick up such shreds of melody as might be wafted through the windows. The two candidates were accommodated with seats in front, just under the platform. Cornelius was terribly nervous, we could see that. In spite of much oil, his hair hung lankly ; his lips required frequent moistening, and his damp palms went continually up and down over his twitching knees. Fanny's demeanour was a complete

contrast. Fresh and bewitching in a frock none had set eyes on before that night, she nodded and smiled to friends in the audience, leaned to whisper in the ear of her father as he sat beside her twirling that massive gold watch-chain of his, peeped roguishly round at her adversary, and, in short, carried on in a way that betokened the utmost coolness and confidence. I doubted at the time if she was wise in this. A little more diffidence would have better become a modest maiden, and that extremely smart frock of hers was hardly calculated to conciliate a certain section of her judges. There was whispering behind me, where Maria the bakehouse woman sat with a knot of her cronies. I caught ominous fragments.

"Aw, ess, my dears—think a bra-ave lot of ourselves, I assure 'e! . . . Bowld 'uzzy, say I! A giggling, goggling giglet! . . . Aw, sinful! Fower shilling the yard for lining, so I'm towld. . . . Ess, poor chap—melting away like butter in the pan. My heart do go out to him. . . . Laughing, eh? Needn' make so sure; us haven' voted yet. Shouldn' be frightened if somebody find her cake dough presen'ly, and the pigs a-ateing of it. . . . S-sh! They'm a-going to begin."

The group of seniors, who had been earnestly conversing on the platform, now broke up. James-over-to-shop approached the candidates and whispered them in turn. Cornelius shook his head dismally; Fanny nodded hers gaily, and began to take off her gloves.

"Six buttons, as I'm a Christian woman!" came from behind me.

Meanwhile, Bessie's Tom had unlocked the harmonium and arranged the music. Fanny rose, stepped on to the platform with all the assurance in the world, and took her seat at the instrument. A dead silence prevailed while she deliberately settled her skirts, took off her rings, and made little dogs'-ears at the foot of every page. At this juncture, James, who had not quite recovered from the bewildering effects of his own metaphor about the skiffie-boats, took out his watch and laid it on the ledge before him, with the evident intention of timing the performance. Then Fanny glanced at the opening bars, set her delicate fingers to stop after stop until all were out, including that trickish Expression stop which only the most expert performers dare meddle with, and then—crash!—we embarked on a swift torrent of sound. It never paused nor

slackened ; the pages were turned over by some sleight of hand that none of us was quick enough to follow ; and as for detecting mistakes, if there were any, you simply hadn't time. Say she did slip once or twice ; before you could pounce on the spot, she was plunging along ten bars ahead. The effect was undeniable. We were swept along, carried away, sprayed and buffeted in a wild, tumultuous sea of harmony ; and when finally we were rushed headlong shorewards and left stranded in a haven of silence, we could only gasp and stare amazedly at our fair pilot, as she gathered up her rings and gloves, patted a stray curl, and sailed back to her seat, as cool and unruffled as when she had left it. Yes, it was a wonderful performance ; only too clever, perhaps, for us simple, steady-going folk. It was like a cup of tasty liquor set to our lips and vigorously tipped up, so that we had to swallow the draught at one choking gulp, instead of savouring it slowly, sip by sip. Such miraculous dexterity was beyond Cornelius, we knew ; but dexterity is not everything in art ; and when Cornelius stepped up, his nervousness gone, his lips set, his whole demeanour expressive of a modest determination to do

his best, we settled ourselves back in our seats, nodding to one another, as who should say :
“ Fireworks are over ; now for some music.”

Cornelius began well—soberly, yet energetically. Every note was correct, and we had time to observe its correctness. The time was well marked, and we could help to mark it with approving nods and soft-tapping feet. Cornelius gathered confidence, quickened his pace, and still proceeded without mistake or hesitation until he reached the bottom of the first page. Then he committed a fatal error. We were quite ready to allow him to pause in order to turn over ; such a course is permitted, I believe, in the best musical circles. But Cornelius took it into his head to emulate Fanny’s conjuring tricks. Without stopping, he made a wild snatch at the page with his left hand, turned it over certainly, but at the same time upset the delicate balance of the music-book, which toppled down over the keys, extracted an expostulatory wail from them, and slid off on to the floor. A sympathetic murmur ran through the building, while Cornelius dived hurriedly behind the harmonium. When he reappeared, flushed and trembling, I for one realised that all was

up with him. The poor young man had completely lost his nerve, and the rest of his performance was painful in the extreme. He plunged and floundered, he played flats for sharps and sharps for naturals, he forgot to attend to his wind, he slackened pace and jibbed like a frightened horse before the difficult bars, and when he came to the bottom of the third page, the memory of his first disaster and the prescience of a second overwhelmed him; he snatched his traitorous hands from the keys and buried his shamed face in them. Encouraging whispers arose; he was advised to go on, to take his time, to begin again with a fair start; but all to no purpose. A doleful head-shake was his only response.

There was an embarrassed pause. Nobody quite knew what was to happen next. At last, after a long consultation on the platform, it was whispered about that the programme was to be carried out to the bitter end, and we were to go below and seal Fanny's victory with a formal vote. We rose and filed out, leaving the two alone together.

First there was silence for a little while, neither stirring. Cornelius remained huddled

up over the harmonium, a picture of ungainly despair, and Fanny sat looking at him with meditative, not un pitying eyes. Then Fanny took out her handkerchief, and a delicate fragrance stole over the blank misery of her companion's senses, like beauty walking in darkness. She passed the handkerchief over her lips, hemmed prettily, and made low music of Cornelius' name. He heard without power to reply, as a lost soul might hear a victorious pitying angel.

"Cornelius," said Fanny again, and rose and stood beside him. It was then, I think, at the sight of his distress, that the woman first awoke in the flighty, heedless schoolgirl, and a womanly impulse took her to his side on a woman's comforting mission. The moment had its sympathetic magic, if Cornelius would only look up.

"Cornelius," said Fanny, "I'm vexed. I can't tell 'e how vexed I am. Don't be so down about it. 'Twasn't your fault. 'Twas an accident; anybody could see that. You began splendid—made me wretched to hear 'e. For I did want to win, Cornelius."

"You've won," gloomed a hollow voice.

"No credit in a come-by-chance victory," said Fanny. "I'd sooner be beat fair than win like that."

"I don't grudge it to 'e," muttered Cornelius, dropping his hands, but still not looking up. "'Twas the shame that hurt. Now 'tis over, I'm glad."

"Thank 'e for that," said Fanny, quite tenderly. "I'd never have said the same myself. 'Tisn't in a woman, I fear."

Cornelius looked up into a pair of soft grey eyes. The magic began to work.

"I wouldn't grudge 'e nothing you'd a mind to—you know that," he said emphatically. "You know 'twas my wish to stand aside."

"Why?" asked innocent Fanny.

Cornelius stood up. "I can tell 'e if you do wish," said he.

"Tell away!" laughed she.

Cornelius drew a breath. "Well then, 'twas because——"

"No! Don't tell! My mind's changed. I don't wish to hear a word."

"'Twas because——"

"Just hark to them down under. Like a swarm of bees!"

"Because——"

Fanny leaned over the music-book, turned a page, and said hurriedly—

"I've something to tell 'e myself. I'm a

rogue and a cheat, Cornelius. I—I've played that piece before. Oh, and more than once! Cornelius, I know that piece without book! There! what do 'e think of me now, for a chapel-member?"

Cornelius didn't even pretend to look shocked.

"Don't know about that," he averred, "nor I don't care. But I'll tell 'e what I think of 'e for a maiden."

"But I know already," murmured Fanny, drooping her eyes.

"Do 'e now? That's very well," said Cornelius, drawing near.

"Yes. *An uppish flirtingill of a maid!*" quoted she. "Ha-ha! your own words, Cornelius Johns!"

Cornelius did not look foolish for more than a moment.

"Fanny," he began again, with threatening tenderness.

"That's my name, sure enough," said Fanny smartly.

"Fanny dear——"

"That's what father do call me, and not another man among 'e has the right to make so free."

"Fanny darling," amended he.

"Worse and worse! Why, young man, whatever are 'e getting at?"

"At the little red mouth of 'e for choice," he answered in a flash, and put out an arm ready crooked. In a moment the harmonium was between them, and Cornelius was ruefully rubbing a scarlet cheek.

A stifled groan sounded from the other end of the chapel. The pair turned with a guilty start and encountered the stony glare of James-over-to-shop. James held their looks for an awful half-minute; then he wagged a slow disgusted head, and, saying no word, beckoned them sternly. With downcast eyes they followed him out of the door, down the steps, through the crowd of unorthodox folk that surged and murmured in the outer darkness, and so into the schoolroom below.

Their entry crystallised a scene of great disturbance. The orderly audience of ten minutes ago was gathered in noisy gesticulating groups, which, without intermitting their own voluble argument, continually manœuvred to get a clear view of the top of the room, where Farmer Worth, his face crimson with anger, his arms flying abroad like a windmill's, appeared

to be impartially distributing unpalatable pieces of his mind among a little cluster of our most respected members, the same who had lately figured with such tact and dignity on the platform. Now, in their Sunday broad-cloth, with their faces of shameful amazement, they looked for all the world like a flock of silly black sheep being worried by a bristling farm dog.

With the appearance of Fanny and Cornelius a dead silence fell. All eyes were on the two, and you could have heard that dear old pin drop quite plainly. Then Bessie's Tom stepped forward, grave and resolute. Farmer Worth immediately dived at him, barking, but was arrested by a dignified wave of Tom's hand.

"No interrupting the chairman, if you please, Mr. Worth," said he. "Friends and neighbours all," he continued, with your true orator's swell of the chest, "I do my duty without fear nor favour, nor I ben't to be turned off by scandalous words. What's my duty? To act according to your vote. Do I make individious question about the rights of that vote? No, I do not. A vote's a vote, right or wrong. 'Tis so in Parliament, and the

same here. Willing or onwilling, I'm bound to bide by en, and I proceed to act accoording."

Here Tom paused, dived into his pocket, fished out the key, and continued—

"Cornelius Johns!" (Cornelius and Fanny started violently.) "Cornelius Johns, stand foorth, and take this key from my hands, which is clean hands, me being chairman and so not having no vote, I'm thankful to say. Step up, Cornelius, and take the key, which have been awarded to 'e by this here meeting of justified Christians, by forty-seven votes agin thirty-three, on account of your having made such a terrible mess of the Celebrated Hallelujah Cooress!"

At these words, flung at their heads with the bitterest emphasis by Bessie's Tom, the company broke into fresh uproar. Farmer Worth plunged forward again, roaring—

"Fan! Come thee'st home along o' me, Fan! Out o' this den of rogues before the roof do fall, not forgetting to scrape your boots at the door, according to Scripture! Harken to me, all of 'e, rogues forty-and-seven! Daniel Worth's a Churchman from this day henceforth, and so's his daughter; and I will conclude

these few words by remarking: Down with the Methodays!"

The din redoubled, while the two, who had been snatched from the green meadows of romance to be dumped down on this furious field of battle, looked at each other with pale questioning faces, and drew insensibly together. What did it all mean?

In two words—and hereon let all reformers ponder—it meant Female Suffrage. More at length, it meant that warm feminine sympathy with masculine distress, and hot feminine prejudice against bold, overdressed, flagrantly well-looking hussies, had combined to prevail against cold abstract justice. No sooner had we gathered in the schoolroom than a hurried canvass was begun among the sex, and strong pressure was brought to bear on every amenable male, with the result that, out of the thirty-three that supported Fanny, not one was a woman, while the majority of forty-seven included every petticoat in the room, together with a herd of meek husbands and subservient sweethearts.

As Cornelius did not budge, Tom forced his way to him and thrust the key into his passive hand.

"Glad to get rids av 'um and wish 'e joy and never agin while I do live," said Tom in a breath.

Cornelius stared stupidly at the key. Then he looked a desperate inquiry at Fanny; and then, reading no answer on her blank face, he followed his own impulse, stood forth, and spoke in a clear voice—

"'Tis the custom, b'lieve, to return thanks." Silence fell. "Shan't do nothing of the sort!" Murmurs arose. "Here's the key; 'tis mine, you say. Very well. If 'tis mine, I can do what I like with it. I now proceed to resign it." (Sensation.) "I resign it in favour of Miss Fanny Worth, where it do belong."

What with the deafening uproar, with everybody in a wide circle round the pair, with the door burst open and the eager heterodox pouring into the room in shoals, it was just like the endmost scene in a stage play.

Cornelius was pressing the key on Fanny, who had whipped her hands behind her and was backing away from him.

"Don't be so foolish as you are, Fan," he urged, in a low voice. "Take it. 'Tis yours by rights."

"No!" she said, under her breath. "No!"

she repeated aloud, and bravely faced the throng.

"Friends," she said, "and—foes ; I should wish to say a few words. You've voted against me. I quite agree with you there. 'Twas no fair trial, as I told Cornelius Johns just now. I'd got that piece at my fingers' ends all the while. 'Twas downright cheating, but I hope you'll all forgive me, which I don't deserve, but Cornelius have forgiven me already, I know — leastways, I think — but you have, haven't 'e, Cornelius?"

"Well spoke! A brave maid!" shouted somebody in the background.

"Oh, oh!" wailed Fanny. "Take me away!"

It is to be supposed she knew whose arm went about her and drew her out of the room. I am told that at the door she looked up and smiled tearfully into his face. Somebody raised a cheer behind them, and all the men and quite a number of the women joined in. Then we looked at one another, and Penticost's shrill bleat was heard—

"But who's going to play our harmonium next Sunday? That's what I want to know."

"Well, my dears," said Bessie's Tom, "us

haven' done so well by this here business as we might. Nothing to be proud of, as I think you'll all agree. I should say we'd best leave it to the two that's just gone out. It look to me like they'm going to settle it nice and comfor'ble between theirselves."

And so they did, and Fanny presides at the harmonium when she is so inclined, and Cornelius when she isn't. And we have had no reason so far to be dissatisfied with this double arrangement.

And so, pleasantly concluding with a picture of two young hearts united by a common love of the Divine Art—there is no stouter link, believe me, in all Cupid's armoury—the present chronicler of Porthjulyan makes his bow, hoping that he has gone some way towards justifying that lordly eulogy of his little town which he borrowed in the first instance from Bessie's Tom. Has he tempted you to pay us a visit? You shall receive a Cornish welcome; none is heartier. You shall be made free of our Club; Penticost shall yarn to you; Bessie's Tom shall affably argue your head off; James-over-to-shop shall give you an insight into many strange things; Sam Jago shall watch you and weigh

you in silence from his corner, and having found you worthy, shall impart to you lavishly of his store of wit and wisdom ; Ned Rundle, mellowed by marriage, shall carry you off to inspect his house and his wife, and leave you doubtful which he takes most pride in ; Fiddler Harry shall melt you with sweet sounds ; you shall attend chapel in the morning to hear Cornelius, in the evening to hear Fanny ; Gov'ment shall unbutton to you ; and even Juliana's horde shall smile on you from its battlements. For the stranger within our gates is sacred ; of him we keep silence, save from good words. But if you cannot come, the loss (believe me) is yours, and (I assure you) ours too. And so good-bye, and " Wish 'e well.'

MR. SAMPSON

ON a moorland by-road two cottages stood under one roof. One had four rooms, the other only two—a kitchen below and a bedroom above. It was a lonely spot; the nearest house was a mile away, the nearest village twice as far. Catherine and Caroline Stevens occupied the larger dwelling; the other had been vacant for many years. The sisters owned both houses, and had a modest little income besides, which they supplemented by the sale of the produce of their poultry-yard. Catherine was fifty-five, Caroline fifty-three, and they had dwelt in this solitary place all their lives. Seniority, and a shade of difference in their temperaments, gave Catherine the rule. She was the more active of the two, and had what she humbly called a temper. Speaking in parables, she drank weak tea, while milk and water sufficed for the gentle Caroline. Catherine was the business woman. Eight o'clock on

every Thursday morning saw her trudging down the road on her way to a neighbouring market town, with a basket on her arm containing eggs and perhaps a chicken or two, while Caroline, who seldom stirred abroad, stood at the gate and watched her out of sight. Caroline was on the watch again at five in the evening, to greet her on her return with the week's supply of groceries and gossip.

One Thursday she was back a full half-hour before her time. She panted as she sat down, and her eyes were bright with excitement. Caroline's pulse began to flutter.

"Sister," she said faintly, "what is 'a?"

Catherine pointed to the fireplace.

"There's somebody want to take it," she said.

"The house? Never!"

"Ess, the house. A man."

"Sister! A single man!"

"Ess. A stranger from up the country."

"Aw, Cath'rine! You didn'——"

"Ess, I did. Why not? Trust me. I know better from worse. A staid man, and his name's Isaac Sampson, and that's a good respectable name—took out of Scripture, both ends of it. And he's to work 'pon the roads, breaking stones, and there an't no solider trade

than that, I should think. And he'll pay a shilling a week, and I've took the arnest-money for the first week, and him and the furniture's coming up to-morrow. There!"

Caroline gasped.

"Cath'rine! A single man, and a foreigner! And us all alone!"

"You'm talking foolish, sister. A staid, respectable man, I tell 'e, and sixty if he's a day. You've see'd en too, and spoke to en. He passed o' Tuesday and give us the time o' day."

"There was two people passed o' Tuesday."

"This one passed in the morning."

Caroline reflected.

"Grey whiskers all round, soft black hat up to 'm, stooped a bit, and said 'marnen,' broad-like?"

"That's the chap. I reco'nised him to once when 'a spoke to me. A civiller-spoken man I never look to meet. Recommended by the butcher, too. Ess, I asked Mr. Pearse about him, and 'a said 'a was honest enough for all he knowed—and that's a deal for a man to say that kill his own meat. I'll tell 'e how 'twas."

With all its ramifications of detail and

comment, the telling of the five minutes' interview in the market-place took half an hour at least. By that time the idea which at first had so terrified Caroline had grown familiar and accepted.

"P'raps if we ask him," said she, "he'll kill the chickens for us. I shan't never get over wringing the poor dear mortals' necks, not if I live to be a hundred."

It was late next evening when Mr. Sampson arrived with his possessions in a farm-cart. The sisters watched, peeping from behind the geraniums into the rainy April twilight, while the furniture was being unloaded. Evidently Mr. Sampson was no Sybarite. When a chair, a table, a bed, a box, and a miscellaneous bundle had been carried in, the empty cart drove off, and the new tenant went in and shut the door.

"My life! did 'e see?" exclaimed Catherine. "No carpet, no mats, no ornymments, not so much as a li'll picksher! A rough sort, I seem. I do 'most wish I hadn' took his shilling."

"Poor soul!" murmured Caroline. "At his age, and nobody to look after him! I'm glad

we laid the fire. He'll be looking for a bit o' comfort in a strange house, and there an't no better comp'ny than a good fire, nor no worse than a black grate this wisht malincholy weather. I hope he'll light the fire."

"He'll be biling the water for his tay, I reckon," said Catherine, "so he's bound to light en."

"Cath'rine! I didn' see no kettle carr'd in!"

"Nor I nuther, come to think. P'raps 'twas in his box."

"With his Sunday clo'es! A dirty black kettle! Aw, Cath'rine!"

"Well, must be somewheres. The man must have his tay. 'Tidn' in nature for a mortal to go without tay."

"Well, I do hope he've lighted the fire. That kitchen's like a bird-cage for draughts. . . . Aw, my dear life! what was that?"

They were sitting by the fire, and out of the back of the grate came a sudden sound, a sharp double tap, twice repeated. They looked at each other in some alarm, for it seemed to be in the room with them. Then Catherine's face cleared.

"I know," she said confidently. "He's knocking his pipe agin the bars of the grate.

He's a-setting there, close up to we, smoking away 'front of the fire."

"Like father used," said Caroline. "Nice and comfor'ble, with his boots off, I shouldn' wonder. There! now he's raking the fire. 'Tis 'most as if 'a was in the same room with us."

They kept silence for a while, trying to realise their new neighbour's proximity through the party wall, straining their eyes after the shadow of his company. Presently Catherine had an idea.

"How if we should rattle the fire-showl a bit?" she suggested. "'Twill seem more sociable, like."

Caroline stretched out her hand, and drew it back, reddening.

"I don't like to, somehow. It seem so—so forward, like-a-thing."

"Aw, nonsense! How's going to know we done it a-purpose? And the grate wants righting up, anyhow. Here, give it me."

She scraped up the ashes with defiant vigour, and let the shovel fall clattering.

"There! Now call your sister all the bold 'uzzies you can think for!"

Caroline smiled faintly, holding up her finger.

But even if Mr. Sampson heard the signal, he was not imaginative enough to interpret its kindly meaning, and respond. It was ten minutes before they heard another sound—the double tap again.

“One more pipe, and then to bed,” commented Catherine. “That was father’s way.”

They remained over the fire, talking a little in discreet tones, their ears ready to seize the slightest sound through the wall, their imaginations busy with the man who sat unconscious within a few feet of them. Once he coughed, and they speculated on the sound. Was it an ordinary clearing of the throat, as Catherine maintained, or was Caroline right in detecting a hollow ring, and arguing a weakness of the chest? Once he whistled a few slow notes; they recognised a fragment of a revival hymn, and drew favourable deductions. If it had been a low pothouse song—! At last they heard once more the tap-tap of the pipe-bowl, followed immediately by the scraping of chair-legs on the bare floor.

“Just like I said!” exclaimed Catherine. “He’s going to bed now. La me! ’tis nine o’clock! How quick the time have gone, to be sure!”

"I'm glad we took him in, good man," said Caroline. "It make a bit o' comp'ny don't 'a?"

Sleep was long in coming to them after the social excitements of the evening. They awoke later than usual next morning, and were only down in time to see Mr. Sampson go past on his way to work. They hurried to the gate.

"He don't stoopy so much as I thought," said Caroline. "A clever man for his age, I seem. Idn' his left-hand coat pocket plummed out, like?"

"So 'tis. Got his dinner inside, I reckon. Wonder what 'a is."

"Cath'rine! How's going to manage for his meals?"

"Dunnaw. Cook 'em himself, s'pose, same as we. And a wisht poor job 'a 'll make of it, I seem."

"Poor chap! We — we couldn' offer to cooky for 'm, s'pose?"

"Wouldn' be fitty—not till we do know him better. Pretty and foolish we'd look if 'a was to say 'No, thank 'e.'"

"P'raps he'll ask us to," said Caroline as they turned to go in. "Aw, Catherine! If 'a haven' gone and left the door all abroad!"

"So 'a have, the careless chap! I've a mind——"

She turned about, looked warily down the road, and then marched resolutely out of the one gate and in at the other.

"What be doing, sister? Cath'rine, what be about?"

Catherine's face was set. "I'm going to geek in," she said, and went straight up to the door. A fearful fascination drew Caroline after her. Together they peeped into the room.

"There's his mug and tay-pot on the table," whispered Catherine. "I don't see no plate."

"Nor no kettle," murmured Caroline. "I'd a jealous thought 'a hadn' got no kettle. Look, he've a-bilet the water for his tay in that dinky saucepan."

"I'm going inside," Catherine announced, and stepped boldly forward. Caroline cast a nervous glance behind her, and followed.

"Here's a frying-pan, all cagged with gress; haven' been claned, not since 'twas bought, by the looks of it. He've had bacon for his brukfas'."

"Here's the piece in the cupboard—half a pound of streaky; and nothing else but the heel of a loaf."

"I claned up the floor yes'day, and now look to en! Such a muck you never behold."

"Cath'rine! We can't leave en go on this-a-way! It go to my heart to see en so."

"No more we won't. We'll come in after brukfas' and do up the place."

"But he'll know. He might be vexed."

"Don't care," said Catherine recklessly. "If he's vexed, he can take himself off. This room have got to be clane and fitty agin Sunday, and clane and fitty we'm going to make it."

One thing led to another. On his return Mr. Sampson found the house swept and garnished. The grate was polished, the fire laid; a strip of old carpet was spread before the hearth, another strip guarded the entry. A piece of muslin had been nailed across the window, and on the window-shelf stood two geranium plants, gay with scarlet blossom. The table was set for a meal, with knife, fork, mug and plate, and on the plate was an inviting brown pasty. He went upstairs, and found his bed neatly made, and a bright-coloured text pinned on the wall where it would meet his waking eyes. Mr. Sampson pondered on these things while he ate the pasty to the last crumb. Presently he went out and knocked at his

neighbours' door. Catherine opened it; the other conspirator trembled in the background.

"Thank 'e, marm," said Mr. Sampson shortly.

"You'm welcome, Mr. Sampson. Anything we can do to make 'e comfor'ble——"

Mr. Sampson shifted his feet, spat respectfully behind his hand, and said nothing. Catherine gained courage.

"Won't 'e step inside?" she asked, and immediately bobbed backwards, uttering an odd little squeak, as her skirt was tugged from behind by the alarmed Caroline. Mr. Sampson stared at her in mild astonishment.

"No, thank 'e—do very well here," he said. "Pasty was capital," he added after a pause.

"Sister made it. She's gen'rally reckoned a good hand.

"Thank 'e, marm," said Mr. Sampson, raising his voice and addressing the obscure interior over Catherine's shoulder. The vague figure within responded with a flutter and an inarticulate twitter. "If you'll leave me know what's to pay——"

"We won't say nothing 'bout that, Mr. Sampson. But I was going to say—sister and me have been talking things over—and I was going to ask 'e——"

With many hesitations Catherine expounded a plan of mutual accommodation, by which she and Caroline were to cook his food and keep his rooms tidy in return for the heavier outdoor work—digging the garden, gathering fuel from the moor, and the like. A special clause stipulated for the wringing of the chickens' necks. Mr. Sampson agreed readily, and grew spasmodically confidential. Lived with a widowed sister till last year. Sister married again, and gone to live in the shires. Doing for himself ever since, and making a terrible poor job of it. Knew no more about cooking than a cow did about handling a musket. Could make shift to fry a rasher, and that was about all. Reckoned he'd do very well now, and was properly grateful to the ladies for their proposal.

"Aw, you'm kindly welcome, Mr. Sampson!" It was Caroline who spoke, close up to her sister's elbow.

"Thank 'e, marm," he replied, and Caroline shrank back into the shadows.

The arrangement worked capitally. Every evening on returning from work, Mr. Sampson found his house in order, his table laid, and

something savoury warming at the fire—a broth of leeks and turnips, maybe, or maybe a potato pie. The pasty for to-morrow's "crowst" was ready in the cupboard. Having supped and digested, he would go forth and work in the garden till dusk, when he would come round to the door for a few good-night words with the sisters. Bit by bit, Caroline's maidenly tremors subsided. She gathered confidence before this mild, slow-spoken old man, and when at the end of the second week he came to pay his rent, and was invited once more by Catherine to step inside, and was politely demurring, it was the younger sister's soft "Do 'e now, Mr. Sampson," that decided him to enter.

When he had gone, they agreed that his company manners were unexceptionable. Thrice he had to be pressed to light his pipe before he would consent, and then—what touched them most—every few minutes he bestirred his stiff joints, went to the door, and put his head outside like a real gentleman, instead of making a spittoon of their spotless fireplace. They felt safe in repeating the invitation. Soon no invitation was needed. He dropped in as a matter of course every

evening at the accustomed hour, sat for the accustomed period in his accustomed chair, and bore his part in the accustomed talk. It was a wonder to Caroline that she had ever been afraid of him, now that he had come to be as much a part of the natural scheme of things as the grandfather clock that ticked in the corner by the staircase. Indeed, with his round moon-face, his slow and weighty speech, and his undeviating regularity of habits, he bore no small resemblance to that venerable timepiece. The comparison does him great honour; for "Grand'fer," as the sisters affectionately called it, held a deservedly high place in their esteem. Those who dwell in crowded marts may regard their clocks and watches as mere mechanical contrivances; but to two lone women in a solitary place, the household clock, especially if it be such a clock as Grand'fer, with his imposing seven foot of stature and his solemn visage of shining brass, is something more than a mere nest of cogs and pulleys. Such a clock is the real master of the house; he orders the comings and goings, the down-sittings and uprisings of his votaries; his ponderous ticking pervades every room; when he huskily clears his throat, voices are hushed

and respectful silence is kept till he has delivered his hourly message to transient mortality ; the operation of winding him up is an affair of solemn ritual. It was not long before Mr. Sampson heard the history of the two outstanding events in Grandf'er's otherwise untroubled existence—the vain and impious attempt of a misguided stranger to carry him off in exchange for a paltry twenty pounds in gold, and that other episode of his frenzy, when, in the dead of night, he had a false alarm of Eternity, and struck a hundred and seventeen on end, while the sisters, called from their beds by the dread summons, hovered about him, white-robed and tearful.

The four made a comfortable and well-balanced *partie carrée*. Catherine led the talk ; Mr. Sampson seconded her bravely ; Caroline was the best of listeners ; while Grandf'er filled the gaps, when gaps occurred, with his well-conned discourse, soothing to hear with a clear conscience at the end of a well-spent day. There was no more harmonious and happy a fireside company in all the countryside.

Then came the catastrophe. One evening—it was a Thursday, about three months after Mr. Sampson's arrival—he knocked at the

door as usual. It remained shut. He tried the latch. It would not open. He called out, and Catherine's voice made answer:

"Grieved to say it, Mr. Sampson, but you can't come in."

"How? What's up with 'e?"

"I can't tell 'e, but you mustn' come in. Will 'e please to go away, Mr. Sampson?"

He thought it over slowly. "No," he said at last. "Not till I do know what's the matter."

"Aw dear!" There were tears in her voice. "I beg of 'e, go!"

"Not till I hear what's up," he repeated.

A murmur of agitated talk came to his ears.

"If you'll open door," he said, "you can tell me comfor'ble. I won't come in if you don't wish, but I'm bound to know what's up."

More whispering. Then a bolt was withdrawn, and the door opened an inch or two.

"Come," he said, and pushed gently. The door resisted.

"I can't look 'e in the face. If I must tell 'e, I must, but I die of shame if I look 'e in the face."

"So bad as that?"

"Worse. Worse 'n anything you could think for. Aw dear! How be I to tell 'e?"

The door threatened to close again. Mr. Sampson said nothing, but quietly set his foot in the gap between door and door-post. It was a substantial foot, substantially shod. The mere toe of it, which alone was visible within, was eloquent of masculine determination. Catherine made a desperate plunge.

"Mr. Sampson, they'm a-talking about us."

"How *us*?"

"You and we. 'Tis all over the country—scand'lous talk. Aw, that I should live to see the day!"

"If you'll kindly give me the p'tic'lars, marm," he said patiently, after a pause.

"We never thought no harm," she sobbed. "'Twas only neighbourly to offer to do for 'e, and you all alone and so helpless. I'm sure the notion never come into our heads. 'Tis a sin and shame to say such things."

"Say *what* things?"

"Say—we—we'm a-trying to catch 'e!"

The terrible word was out. The pair within awaited the result with trembling expectation. It came—first a long low whistle; then—could they believe their ears?—an unmistakable chuckle. Catherine shrank back as from the hiss of an adder. The door swung open

and Mr. Sampson confronted them, his eyes a-twinkle with sober enjoyment.

"That's a stale old yarn," he said. "Heard en weeks ago. Only 'twas told *me* 'tother way about. Don't mind telling 'e I mightn' have thought of it else."

"Thought of what, Mr. Sampson?"

"Why, courting of 'e, to be sure," said the gentleman placidly.

The ladies gasped in unison.

"You don't mane to say you—you'm——" stammered Catherine at last.

"Ess, I be, though. This fortnit, come Sunday. If you'll kindly take it so, and no offence."

"But—but we never noticed nothing."

"No, s'pose. 'Tis like the cooking, you see—I'm a terrible poor hand at it. Now 'tis out. Ben't vexed, I hope."

"Aw, no! But——" *

"There!" he hurried on. "Think it over, will 'e? There's the saving to consider of, you see, money and trouble both. And I've put by a pound or two. Not so young as I was, but we an't none of us that. And not so dreadful old, nuther. Wouldn' think of parting of 'e; reckon we could be pretty and com-

for'ble together, the three of us, though I can't marry but one of 'e, 'course. So talk it over, will 'e? I'll be round agin to-morrow evening. Good-night."

He had reached the gate before Catherine found voice to recall him.

"Mr. Sampson! Plaise, Mr. Sampson!"

"Well, marm?" he said, slowly returning.

"Ascuse my asking, but—would 'e mind telling—telling *whichy* one you was thinking of—of courting?"

Mr. Sampson's fingers went to the back of his head.

"Now you'll be laughing upon me," he said. "Whichy one? Well, I don't know whichy one, and that's the truth. But it don't make no odds," he added cheerfully. "Settle it between yourselves. I ben't noways p'tic'lar."

"La, Mr. Sampson! Who ever heard tell of such a thing?" cried Catherine, giggling in spite of herself.

"That's right!" he chuckled. "Laugh so much as you've a mind to. Sister laughing too?"

Caroline's nervous titter passed muster.

"Now we'm comfor'ble," he remarked. "Reckon I can step inside now, and no scandal."

In he walked, none hindering, took his usual

chair, spread his hands on his knees, and beamed on the sisters.

"Ess," he continued. "I'm like the old cat in the bonfire—don't know which course to steer. Never was such a case, s'pose. I've turned it over this way, and I've rolled it over that way, and I can't come to no conclusion. Always seeing you together, you see, I can't part 'e nohow, no more than milk from water. But don't matter, as I said before. If only you'll be so kind as to settle it between yourselves——"

"We couldn' do that," said Catherine emphatically.

"Couldn' 'e, now?" He turned inquiringly to Caroline. Caroline shook her head.

"Wouldn' be fitty," she murmured.

"Well, you do know best," said Mr. Sampson, a little dashed, and pondered, his eyes on the ground, while the sisters shot sidelong glances at him and avoided each other's looks. He lifted his head and caught Caroline's eye.

"Cath'rine's the best to manage things," said Caroline, in a hurry.

He looked hopefully at Catherine.

"Car'line's the best cook by far," she hastened to say.

Mr. Sampson thumped his knee.

"That's where 'tis!" he exclaimed. "The pair of 'e rolled up together 'ud make a complete masterpiece. A man couldn' look for a better wife than the two of 'e 'ud make. That's where 'tis, nor I don't see no way out of it—not in a Christian country. Ah!" he added meditatively. "These heathen Turks—they know a thing or two after all, don't they?"

"Mr. Sampson, I wonder at 'e!" cried Catherine, shocked at this libertine sentiment.

"'Tidn' to be thought of, I know that," he apologised. "But I can't think of no other way. Without"—he brightened—"without we should spin up a ha'penny and bide by the fall of en."

"Never in this house!" exclaimed Catherine, more shocked than ever.

"Don't see how we shouldn'," he maintained stoutly. "'Tis just the same as casting lots, and that's a good Scripture observance. The reg'lar way with these old patriarchs, so I'm given to onderstand; only 'twas shekels with them, I reckon. But shekels or ha'pennies, 'tis all one."

"If you'm sure 'tis Scriptural," said Catherine, impressed and half convinced.

"Sound Bible doctrine, my word for 'n

An't that so, marm ?" he added, appealing to Caroline.

"I mind a text in Proverbs," said Caroline shyly, "which say, 'The lot causeth contentions to cease.'"

"See!" ejaculated Mr. Sampson. "That's of it! 'The lot causeth contentions to cease.' 'Tis aimed straight at our case. Out o' Proverbs, too! Old Solomon's the chap for we. See how 'a settled that argyment 'bout the baby. And there was two ladies in *that*. Well, then ?"

Catherine shook her head doubtfully, but offered no further objection. Mr. Sampson produced a handful of coins, chose one with fitting deliberation, and held it up for inspection.

"Now," he announced. "If 'a should turn up the old Queen, then 'tis Cath'rine. If 'tis the young person with the prong, then Caroline's the one. And up she goes."

It was not the spin of an expert, and he failed to catch the flying coin. It fell to the ground in the dark corner by Grandf'er. Mr. Sampson went down on his hands and knees, while the sisters held their breaths.

"Well, I'm darned !"

The ladies jumped. Mr. Sampson rose slowly to his feet, holding the halfpenny at arm's length and smiling foolishly upon it.

"If it had been a lime-ash floor, now," he said.

"What's wrong?" Catherine found breath to ask.

"Fell in a crack o' the planching, my dear. Found en sticking there edge up, and no head to en, nor yet no tail. Old Solomon himself couldn' make nothing by en. But how come you to have a timbern floor to your kitchen, when mine's lime-ash?"

"'Twas father's doing when the house was built," said Caroline. "He always liked to take off his boots of a' evening, and lime-ash is that cold-natured, 'tis apt to give 'e chilblains through your stockings."

"Well, to see how things do turn out!" meditated Mr. Sampson.

"'Twas ordained, I seem," said Caroline solemnly.

"A token, sure enough," agreed Catherine. "And father's eyes upon us this very minute, I shouldn' wonder. Mr. Sampson—I doubt 'tis all foolishness, and we'd best say no more about it."

"Don't see that," said he. "If your father didn' choqse to wear slippers, that an't no lawful reason why I shouldn' get married if I want to. Must try some other way, that's all."

Again he pondered, till Caroline broke the silence with a timid suggestion.

"If," she hesitated, colouring, "if we should wait a bit, Mr. Sampson keeping away from us meanwhile, p'raps his heart 'ud speak."

"So 'a might," said the gentleman dubiously; "and then agin 'a mightn'. A mazy old organ, b'lieve."

"Absence make the heart grow fonder, so they say," remarked Catherine.

"That's very well," he replied. "Don't doubt but what 'a do. But how if 'a should make en grow fonder of both of 'e? Where'd us be then? But we'll try if you do wish, though I doubt 'tidn' much use."

Taking his leave, he paused at the door.

"All the same," he said, "I can't help wishing I'd been born a heathen Turk."

Left alone, the sisters had plenty of food for thought. They sat without speaking, and the longer they sat the harder it became to break silence. For the first time in their lives a veil

of reserve was drawn between them, and every moment it thickened and darkened. At last, with a few constrained words for decency's sake, they lit their candles and went to bed. Next morning two heavy-eyed women confronted each other with mistrustful looks over the breakfast-table. The day dragged through on a minimum of conversation, in which no word of their neighbour found a place. Through the morning of the next they held no communication at all, and the air was heavy with suppressed thunder. In the afternoon Caroline set about her preparations for the usual Saturday baking. The materials were ready on the table, when Catherine came in from the garden. Her searching glance on the table hardened into a fixed glare.

"I thought as much," she said, in a tense whisper. "You've been taking those Wyandotte eggs!"

Caroline turned pale.

"S'posing I have!" she made answer at last. Catherine raised her voice.

"You knewed very well I was going to set Toppo on those eggs to-day."

Caroline trembled and clutched the edge of the table.

"S'posing I did!" she whispered.

"Then how come you to take those eggs?"

"I—I shall take what eggs I've a mind to—so there!"

"A mean trick, so 'tis. To take my eggs, what I've been saving up for Toppy, and she as cluck as cluck can be, as you very well know, and in her box this very minute, wearing her heart out over the chaney nest-egg, poor fond little worm! Of all the mean tricks, to take my eggs——"

"Aw, you and your bistly old eggs!"

Even for a maiden attempt at scornful sarcasm it was a wretchedly poor one, and its effect was further discounted when the perpetrator instantly burst into a flood of penitential tears. The next moment they were in each other's arms.

"To think of it!" exclaimed Catherine, as their sobs subsided. "All these years with never a cross word, and now— Aw, drat the man!"

"Sister!"

"Drat the man!" she repeated, revelling in her own profanity. "Wish we'd never set eyes 'pon him. Sarve him right if we sent him 'bout his business!"

"Sister! When we'm both so good as promised to 'n! Beside, 'a wouldn' go. He's terrible obstinate, for all his quiet ways."

"A week's notice 'll settle en," said Catherine viciously.

"Cath'rine, we couldn'! Good man—to be slighted by two in one day, and turned out of house and home overplush—we couldn'!"

"It do seem hard," admitted Catherine. "But we can't go on like this, that's plain."

"P'raps he've made his ch'ice by now."

"If 'a have, 'a can't choose but one of us. And then, where'll the other be? Tell me that!"

"Sister," said Caroline, and paused, and drew a long breath. "Sister dear; I—I ben't in no p'tic'lar vi'lence to get married."

"Caroline Stevens, there's the Bible 'pon the shelf. Lay your hand to 'n, and say those words agin, if you can."

Caroline hid her face in her hands. "I can't," she faltered.

"Nor I nuther. And here we be, the two of us, geeking round the corner after one man! At our age, too! 'Tis shameful! I'm black-red all over at the thought of it. Two silly old women—that's what we be."

"Aw, *don't*, sister!" shuddered Caroline.

"Two silly old women," repeated the merciless self-abaser. "But it shan't be so. Thanks be, I got some sense left in my brain, though my heart's a caudle of foolishness. It shan't be so. The longer he stay, the worse 'twill be, and go he shall. How couldn' 'a make up his mind 'fore speak? 'Twouldn' have happened so then."

"'Twas fo'ced upon him to speak."

"So 'a was. I mustn' be hard 'pon him. 'Tis Doom, I reckon; and better-fit Doom should tend to his battles and murders and sudden deaths, 'stead of coming and plaguing quiet, dacent folk. Well, and Doom shan't have it all his own way, nuther. There shan't be no jalous wife nor no sinful-thoughted sister-in-law, not in this locality."

"Sister, such dreadful talk!"

"'Tis my duty to speak plain. There's bound to be suffering come out of it, but anyways we can choose to suffer respectable. Go he shall."

The garden gate clicked.

"Cath'rine! Here 'a do come! And aw! if I do live, he've got his best clo'es up!"

"Then 'a *have* made up his mind after all, and he've come to tell us so. But 'tis too late now, and 'a shan't name no names, not if I can

help. 'Twill be harder if we do know. Now, Car'line, you'm too soft for this job. You leave en to me, and don't say a word, and, whatever you do, don't start snooling—d'st hear? We got to be hard, or we'll never get rids of him."

The door was tapped and opened, and Mr. Sampson appeared. His hard-pressed holiday suit encased him in its rigid folds, like the stone garments of a statue; his face was one consistent solid smile; a substantial cabbage-rose adorned the lapel of his coat; and his hands—O wonder!—were mailed in enormous black kid gloves. Altogether he made a noble, if stiffish figure, worthy of any woman's affection. Catherine felt her resolution tottering. She advanced one desperate step and shot her bolt.

"Mr. Sampson, you'll kindly take your week's notice from to-day."

The wide expanse of smile slowly crumbled, and as slowly heaped itself up into a round O of ineffable astonishment. Caroline began to whimper. Catherine stealthily shook her by the arm, while Mr. Sampson's eyes roved to the ceiling, the walls, and the floor, in search of symptoms of universal disintegration.

"I'm a dazy old bufflehead, I know," he

began at last, "and I don't azackly seem to get to the rights o' this."

"There an't no rights to en!" cried Catherine wildly. "(*Will 'e stop snooling, sister!*) 'Tis all so wrong as can be, and time to put an end to it. Nor you mustn' ask why, for we can never tell 'e. We'm grieved to put 'e out in any way, and we'm grieved to part with 'e; but go you must, and no questions asked."

Mr. Sampson's scattered wits obeyed his summons. "If I ben't mistook," he said, not without dignity, "there was words passed between us consarning matrimony."

"Foolish words!" interjected Catherine. "Foolisher words were never spoke. They've got to be took back."

"If I ben't mistook," he continued stolidly, "I was told to go away and make up my mind—or my heart, as you may say—if so be I could."

"'Tis too late. We'll be thankful if you won't say no more about it."

"If I ben't mistook," he went on, with a corroborative glance at his festal attire, "I come here just now to say I'd come to a conformable conclusion at last. I come here to say—with doo respect to the other lady, who's good enough for anybody—I come to say I'd pitched

my ch'ice on the lady I should wish to commit matrimony with. And the name of that lady——”

“Don't say the word!” cried Catherine. “'Tis hard enough already; don't 'e go to make it harder. Whichever 'tis, her answer have got to be ‘No.’ An't that so, Car'line?”

Caroline speechlessly assented.

“With best thanks all the same,” continued Catherine in softer tones, “and hoping you won't think too hardly of us, and never shall we think other than kindly o' you, and proud we'd ha' been, ayther one of us, if it hadn' been ordained otherwise, as you'll mind I said to once when the ha'penny stood on edge, and—aw, *will* 'e go, and not stand glazing there like a stuck pig!”

Mr. Sampson stiffened his back. “Very well, marm,” he replied, and began peeling off a glove. “I ben't one to fo'ce myself 'pon nobody.” He attacked the other glove. “Nor I ben't going to state no grievance, nor ask no questions, nor mention no names.” He rolled the gloves into a forlorn and crumpled ball.

“You'll spile 'em,” said Catherine, sniffing audibly. “Give 'em here.”

She took them, smoothed them out, laid

them together, turned one neatly inside out over the other, and gave them back.

"Thank 'e," he said. "Bought 'em for a funeral I didn' go to; never put 'em on till to-day. Queer how things do turn out. Well, if I got to go, then the sooner the better." He took the flower from his buttonhole and laid it on the table. "(Meant for the lady of my ch'ice, not to mention no names.) So I reckon I'll go to once." He fumbled in his pocket. "I can get a bed over to Churchtown—very good beds at the inn, so I'm told—and I'll send along for my things later on." He counted some silver out on the table. "And there's the money owing; two shilling rent for this week and next."

"Mr. Sampson——" Catherine protested through her tears. He raised an implacable hand.

"If you please, marm. According to the law of the land, and not wishing to be beholden to nobody. And that's about all, b'lieve. Good-bye."

"You'll shake hands 'fore go," pled Catherine.

"No, I don't think," said the unforgiving old man. "'Tis the Christian thing to do, I know; but there an't no mistake about it, I ought to have been born a heathen Turk."

Without another word he turned and went. His bent figure passed the window and disappeared.

"He'll scorn us all his life!" wailed Caroline.

"We've done what's right," said Catherine, "so don't matter what he think of us. *I* don't care, for one."

The rose caught her eye. She took it up and lifted it to her face.

"Give it me," said Caroline, dry-eyed of a sudden. "I'll take care of it."

Catherine whipped it behind her back.

"Meant for the lady of his ch'ice," she said. "Maybe you think——"

"I've so much right as you to think——"

They held each other's eyes, and gentle Caroline's look was as hard as her sister's. But the crisis passed as quickly as it had come—with Caroline in a fresh flood, with Catherine in a resolute stamp of the foot.

"It shan't be so!" she declared. Going to the fire, she opened the top of the grate and dropped the flower within. It shrivelled and vanished.

"And there's an end to en," she said. "Dust and ashes. And now, sister, snooling won't help us, but work will, or so they say else. Time to pitch baking; come, bustle."

THE WHITE BONNET

WHEN Susanna Poyner found herself alone in middle age with a tiny cottage of her own and an income to match, she got Christopher Ellery, the carpenter, to run a couple of shelves across the window of the best room. On these she arranged some packets of minor groceries, three or four bottles of sweets, a card of sham jewellery, and a pyramid of oranges, and so took her first timid dip in the great ocean of commerce. The splash she made was almost inaudible; the ripple of interest it spread around was of the faintest. A dozen windows in the village displayed a similar array of dusty bottles and packets, and the jesting stranger has been known to ask if the inhabitants had no other way of supporting themselves than by selling one another baking-powder and acid drops. Susanna herself was modest enough in her aspirations.

"You see," she said to Christopher, as he

hammered away, "I ben't what you may call a laborious woman, but I can't endure to be twiddling my thumbs all day; nor I ben't no gossip, but I do like a bit of company; nor I ben't no money-grubber, but I can't support nature on kettle-broth, and sixpence a day won't bring me much else. So there 'tis: something to do, and somebody coming in now and again, and something gained by the end of the week, if 'tis only fourpence to buy half a pound of butcher's meat for Sunday—that's all I look for. 'Tisn' much, Christopher?"

"I've knowed people to look for more," admitted Christopher, twinkling. "Should think you might safely reckon 'pon fourpence, or even fivepence, taking one week with another. Not all to once, you know. It take some time to work up a trade, b'lieve."

"So much competition!" sighed Susanna. "There's Mrs. Woon across the way. She don't need to keep no shop, with her husband arning good wages. 'Tisn' fair to we that's properly in business."

"Mrs. Woon don't have no customers that I hear tell of," said Christopher, "without 'tis her own family. She buy her soap and starch off of herself, and sell the sweeties to her own

children for the pennies she give them. They do say she keep some pennies a-purpose with holes in 'em, so the custom shan't go out o' the family circle, like. Been going round and round for years, those pennies have, till they're most wore out. Terrible short weight she give them too, so I'm told, and cheat herself over the soap beside."

"Cheat herself!" cried Susanna, throwing up her hands. "The desperate person!"

"'Tis in the blood, b'lieve," said Chistopher. "Her father used to go around selling coals. And that's the last nail, Susanna. Now, if you want any help putting up the things——"

Standing before the little pile of flimsy boxes, he hitched up his sleeves and made a feint of spitting on his hands.

"Now you're joking, I do believe!" exclaimed Susanna, gently reproachful. "But if you wouldn' mind stepping outside, just to see how they look while I put them up——"

"To be sure, my dear," said Christopher heartily, and made his way into the road. Mrs. Woon, peering jealously out from behind her rival shelves, saw him gravely and minutely gesturing with uplifted hand, like an umpire giving "middle" to a batsman, while Susanna,

her fingers trembling with eagerness, shifted the various articles to and fro in accordance with his directions. When all were adjusted to a fraction of an inch, he returned.

"That's all shipshape," he said. "Now you can heave ahead, and good luck to 'e."

"Thank you kindly, Christopher. There—there don't happen to be anything I could sell you this morning, s'pose?"

"Well, I don't know. Starch? Can't call to mind I've any p'tic'lar fancy for starch to-day; nor yet diment rings. And I ben't going to spoil my dinner with no bull's-eyes. 'Bacca, now; if you'd been stocking 'bacca——"

"There now!" cried Susanna. "I did think of getting a licence. 'Tis true I don't hold with smoking, but there's nothing like tobacco for fetching the men along, that's certain. I'm only thirty-seven, Christopher, and I never had a chance with the men while mother was alive. Mother was so particular; there were several cattle-dealers in her family, you see, so she had good reason to be proud. Nobody under the rank of an auctioneer would pass with her; and you know yourself how scarce auctioneers are in these parts, leave alone their flighty ways—here to-day and twenty mile off to-morrow,

and as hard to catch as a King George butterfly. But I *have* been thinking, if only I can 'tice the men into my shop, I might pick up with a solid evangelical farmer, or a staid widow-man with a nice little business."

"I'll think it over, Susanna," said Christopher, with a grave face. "And thank 'e for the hint."

"La, Christopher!" she cried. "You don't think I meant—! Aw, Christopher! I give 'e my word, you're the last person I should ever think of in that way."

"And that's a terrible fine forth-and-back sort of compliment, come to think of it," said Christopher drily.

"Now, Christopher, you do understand my meaning very well. You're a friend. You don't think I'd go setting my traps for a friend, do 'e? 'Twould be like teeling a gin for a tame rabbit—I'd never have the heart to do it. But I do believe you're joking again! I do wish you'd laugh like other people when you make a joke. I can see a joke so well as other people, give me proper warning; but these solemn-faced jokes, they're dangerous things. You mind the story of the wolf, Christopher?"

"To be sure I do," said Christopher, taking

his departure. "He dressed up in sheep's clothing, and went about hooting like a dunkey, and everybody was frightened for their life, till they found out he wadn' nothing but a tame rabbit after all. Good-bye, Susanna."

"He've got it all wrong. Another joke, s'pose," said Susanna, gazing wistfully after him. "I do wish he'd laugh. Even a wink 'ud be better than nothing."

"Poor whiffle-headed soul!" was Christopher's reflection as he went on his way. "She won't make her fortune in a hurry, I seem."

But the curious thing was that Susanna's business grew and prospered from the first, in spite of her complete deficiency in the commercial virtues. Arithmetic was to her a kind of dubious fairyland, where nothing happened but the unexpected; and when, with the increase of trade, she was obliged to set up an account-book, midnight often found her wandering in a dim avenue of debit and credit columns, that wavered and shifted shape at every new inspection, like trees in a mist. Nor could she be styled a brisk saleswoman. The most trifling purchase at her shop was an undertaking to which it was advisable to set aside a good half-hour at least. She had no

more control over the natural perversity of inanimate objects than over the thoughts in her brain, and the article she was most in need of was ever the last to come to hand, if it came to hand at all. But entertainment was never to seek in Susanna's shop ; and therein, perhaps, lay the secret of her success among the joyous, time-scorning folk of the village. Customers might, or might not, obtain what they came to purchase, but they were sure of their diversion, whether it took the form of a frenzied hunt after the missing shoe of a pair, or a candid discussion of the great plan of campaign against the eligible farmer, or a terrific cataclysm among the pickle-bottles.

The parlour was soon too small for the stock. Christopher was called in again to erect a counter in the kitchen and to line its walls with shelves. And still trade grew and space contracted, while Mrs. Woon across the way gnawed her envious lips and freely prophesied disaster. Columns of boxes rose to the ceiling ; bales and sacks obstructed the floor ; stockings and herrings, sunbonnets and ropes of onions, waved overhead like an inverted forest ; and over all, filling every chink and

cranny with its almost palpable presence, was diffused that mightiest and most complicated of smells, the smell of the country shop: a tangled symphony of odours, wherein, on a ground-bass of obscurer perfumes, the bacon theme battled with the lamp-oil phrase, the cheese-and-bloater subject with the soap-and-candle *motif*, like the unfortunate melodies in a tone-poem by the latest German master.

Susanna herself floated a helpless waif on the flood of her own prosperity. At times she murmured a mild complaint in the ear of her friend Christopher.

"Yes, I've been forced to shift the flour-sack and the paraffin to the back-kitchen, where there wasn' but just room to sit and stand before. A keg of paraffin is poor company for a delicate female in her leisurable moments, Christopher. I'd give up to-morrow, if 'twasn' for spoiling my chances with the men. But a person of my age is bound to keep herself to the front, especially with so many widows about. And there an't no mistake, Christopher, the men *are* beginning to buzz around. I had seven here all to once last night, three in the shop and four hovering round the door, like; and there weren't but two married men among

them, and they were the only ones that came to buy. That looks like business, don't 'a?"

"It do that," agreed Christopher. "Seeming to me, I must hurry up, or I'll lose my chance."

"Now, Christopher, you're farcing again. You did ought to be more careful. Suppose I was to take you up ser'ous; where'd you be then?"

"Reckon I'd be 'tother side counter with my arm round your waist. You don't frighten me, Susanna. I've been in worse places than that, and never turned a hair."

Susanna drew herself up.

"Was it tobacco you were wanting, Mr. Ellery?" she asked stiffly.

"If you please, Miss Poyner," he returned imperturbably.

"There 'tis, then. If you'll kindly take it and— Aw, Christopher! See what comes of your joking! You nearly made me speak sharp to 'e! I shan't sleep to-night for thinking of it. How can you be so—so indiscriminate?"

Her eyes filled, and Christopher surrendered.

"There, Susanna! Didn' mane to vex 'e. Wouldn' vex 'e for all the world and Australey beside. You mustn' mind my tejous nonsense."

"Aw, well," she sighed. "Must take you as you are, s'pose."

"That's all I want, Susanna. For better, for worse, as they say in the prayer-book," he replied from the doorway, and disappeared as her hands went up.

One spring morning Susanna had an adventure with a bagman—an exciting adventure in itself, and far-reaching in its consequences as well. It shall be told in her own words.

"I saw him at the gate—only just discerned his outline, like, but I reco'nised him for a traveller to once: for all the world like a real gentleman, only brisker and shinier. I took him for the glass and china person, and not wanting anything in that way, I thought I'd hide, for say 'no' to them I can't when once they begin—they've such a fascinating way with them. No time to slip round to the back, so I lurked down behind the counter, hoping he'd go away after a bit. In he come, and rapped on the counter just over my head, and up went my heart right into my mouth; but I didn' budge, and there was he waiting, and there was I crumpled up on the floor like a cat looking after a mouse, only the other way

about. Then I heard a rustling sound up over, and I couldn' but look up, if 'twas to meet my death; so I screwed my head carefully round, and there I behold a hand, with a massive seal-ring 'pon the little finger, feeling to the sunbonnets up there. That made me doubt if he was the crockery gentleman after all, or he'd have been attracted by the teapots on the shelf behind, more like. Then I fancied could he see my hair, that I'd done up careless-like in a round knap on top, 'stead of plaiting it behind like I gen'rally do. You know how self-conscious your hair do feel when 'tis arranged different from usual. So I was lurking down closer to the floor, when a strange feeling come over, and I knew something dreadful was going to happen. I'd been serving pepper just before, and some of it got spilt on the floor, and there I was, working up for a sneeze. Then I knew 'twas all over with me, for a sneeze is like doom itself; you may dodge it for a bit, but there's no escaping it in the end. So I begun creeping away 'pon my hands and knees, thinking if only I could hold out till I got behind the biscuit boxes I could safely stand up and explode, and he'd think I'd slipped into the shop behind his back.

.

But 'twasn' to be. I hadn' got but half-way when I was forced to let the air in, and—my dear life!—'twas more like a thunderstorm than a sneeze. Up I went like a jack-in-the-box, right in front of his nose, and you never saw anybody more putrefied in your life for the moment. But it takes a lot to decompose a commercial. Before I'd got my breath, his hat was off, and he'd begun, as smooth as salad-dressing, with his 'Good morning, madam; seasonable weather, but trying to them that's subject to colds in the head,'—turning the sneeze off beautiful, I thought, though he must have known 'twasn' no common weather-sneeze. Nothing short of pepper or snuff could be answerable for a sneeze like that. And then he went on, 'If you'll permit me, I should like to direct your attention to our firm's absolutely phenomenal stock of spring millinery,' says he. 'Hats!' said I to myself, 'that accounts for his being allured by the sun-bonnets!' So on he went with the most beautiful flow of language about creations and confections, though I was in such a complicated state of mind I didn' catch but half what he said. And what with my condition, and wanting to get rid of the man, and ashamed to deny

him after the fright I'd given him, I let him book an order for two dozen, and they're coming down in good time for Easter—where I'm to put them I can't think for my life—and if the public don't rally round me, and buy all twenty-four, I'm a ruined woman, and all because I done my hair on top this morning."

But more hopeful views soon prevailed ; and when the hats arrived and were set out for show in her bedroom, and the ladies of the village crowded to view—and what was more, to purchase—she was inclined to be boastful of her business acumen. Some might think she was running a risk, but she was bound to move with the times ; and it was easy enough to create a market, once you know how. With her experience, she believed there was nothing in the realms of commerce that she couldn't dispose of within the limits of the parish—barring gas-stoves, perhaps.

Within a week, all the hats but one had been sold. But when another week passed, and that one still hung on hand, Susanna began to be anxious. Easter Sunday once past, the market for the choicer vanities would be closed indefinitely. Holy Week went by in desperate

but unavailing efforts to push the sale, and Christopher, dropping in on Easter Eve for his usual Saturday chat, found her plunged in gloom.

“The handsomest of the lot, Christopher, and the most expensive, but not a penny more than it’s worth. Everybody admires it, but everybody says the same thing—’tis only fit for a bride. A white bonnet, Christopher, with white flowers and white satin trimmings. And as for the bride to belong with it, I’ve made particular inquiries, and there won’t be one on hand for another twelvemonth at least. I *have* been speaking to some of the young bachelors, trying to urge them on; but you know how ’tis with the men of this parish, young or old: when it comes to matrimony, a snail have got far more enterprise. So there ’tis on my hands till next spring, most like, and by then ’twill be as unfashionable as an addled egg. ’Tisn’ so much what I lose by it, but I’d staked my reputation on selling the lot, and ’tis hard to bear with Mrs. Woon sending the children across every day with mother’s compliments, and have I sold that beautiful bonnet yet, and will I leave her have it for eighteenpence, as she think she might trim it up for a weekly-day hat for little Muriel.”

"Mrs. Woon's a spiteful old venom, if you ask me," said Christopher. "Bonnet upstairs, Susanna?"

"No, I brought it down, so's to have it on the spot. 'Tis in the oven here, out of the way of the dust. Would you like to see it?"

"That's what I was hinting after, Susanna."

She stooped and produced it. Christopher eyed it with that transparent assumption of knowingness which bonnets and babies elicit in the mere male.

"A nice consarn, I dare say, but I can't very well judge without a head inside. Put it on, will 'e?"

"Aw, Christopher, I couldn'! Not before you. You'd laugh."

"Not I. Come, on with it."

Tittering and blushing, she complied, just poising it on her head and snatching it away. With a smile and a colour, Susanna was by no means an ill-looking person.

"A nice consarn, sure 'nough, and suit 'e beautiful," said Christopher approvingly. "Look-see, Susanna; how don't 'e do like Mrs. Woon with *her* stale goods, and buy en off o' yourself?"

"Me, Christopher? A bride's bonnet?"

"That's just of it. What's the use of setting your traps for the men when you don't bait 'em? And where'd you find a tastier bait than that? A man have only got to look upon it for his thoughts to turn after matrimony to once."

"Do 'e really think so?" said Susanna doubtfully.

"Think so? If you'd kept it on, I'd been down 'pon my knees myself in another minute. You take my advice, Susanna, and go to church in that bonnet to-morrow. There won't be an unmarried man that'll have an eye to spare for the rest of the twenty-four, I warrant 'e."

"I'd never have thought of it myself," said Susanna, wavering. "But if you think it suit me—I haven' had a new one for years—to be sure 'twill be completely thrown away if somebody don't wear it—such a lovely bonnet too, it do seem a pity. Well, I'll consider of it, Christopher."

Half-way home, a compunction pricked Christopher. He paused, and had it in his mind to turn back. But for the confirmed jester the way of renunciation is as hard as for the confirmed drinker. He went on his road, salving his conscience with the reflection that it didn't as a rule take Susanna more than

half an hour to see a joke. She'd think better of it, come bedtime. And, anyhow, she didn't look so bad in the bonnet—not half bad, she didn't. If she did hap to catch her man with it, Christopher wasn't sure that he would call that man a fool.

But Susanna had already hurried her shutters up, an hour ahead of time, and was now posing before her looking-glass, trying the effect of the bonnet at various angles, while vague visions of suppliant farmers fledted through her brain. Christopher was right; she had been talking and dallying long enough, and it was time to make a bold stroke. Men did judge so by appearance, and she had neglected her appearance shamefully. And the bonnet did suit her, especially when set just *so*, a trifle forward. Now for a costume to go with it.

The dresses in current wear were fingered and cast aside with contemptuous sniffs. Her vanity was wide awake and hungry after its long slumber. She tugged a heavy chest from under the bed, and foraged among the stratified relics of bygone years. Near the bottom she lit on a flimsy white gown, trimmed with pale blue. The very thing! Rather light and airy, perhaps; but in for a penny, in for a pound.

Not a bit soiled, thanks be, and hardly crumpled. With a little touching up it would look like new, and nobody was likely to remember it after all these years. How well she remembered the feast-day, when she had worn it for the first and only time! It had done some execution then. Yes, to be sure, that was when Christopher was courting his deceased wife, who turned out in pink; but the blue and white carried the day, and Christopher was most attentive, till the slighted one bethought her of fetching Mrs. Poyner on the scene, and Mrs. Poyner took prompt action, whisking her daughter home, despoiling her of her finery, and sending her supperless to bed. To think of her and Christopher sweet-hearting! Well, he was a proper man even now. If only he wouldn't— Boots! She must have a new pair. And a white petticoat, and suitably light-coloured stockings. Well, she had only to make her choice out of the stock downstairs.

She sat up into the small hours, stitching and ironing; and waking dreams occupied her for long afterwards. The church bells aroused her in the morning. Superhuman efforts brought her to the church door, breakfastless,

palpitating, but hardly two minutes late. As she went up the aisle, she was conscious of a murmurous sound gathering behind her—an excited whispering, the rustle of new finery as the wearers turned, the shuffle of masculine feet. Gratified, though somewhat nervous, she minced along to the music of her tight new boots. The murmur swelled. People in front turned their heads. The vicar looked round, caught sight of her, and stumbled in his address. Susanna's composure began to shake. As she passed a row of young maidens, an audible titter shattered it to pieces. She quickened her step to her seat, and buried a hot face in trembling hands. Had a seam burst? Was the bonnet ridiculously awry? She remained a prey to dreadful misgivings until the Gloria brought her to her feet and the psalms began.

Somebody in the seat behind moved from the farther corner and stood at her back.

Upon the words of David delivering his soul against the heathen, broke in the words of Mrs. Woon delivering her soul, in a hissing commentary, of the accumulated rancour of five years' unsuccessful rivalry; and each phrase was a dagger in Susanna's rigid back.

"*Imagine a vain thing.* Vain thing, sure 'nough. Aw, redec'lous! . . . *Have them in derision.* Ess, to be sure! All the church laughing upon her, and no wonder. 'Nough to make a cloamen cat laugh . . . *Be wise now therefore.* At her time o' life! No fool like a' old fool, b'lieve . . . Fancied people wouldn' reco'nise that old dress, shouldn' wonder. 'Twadn' much of a dress five-and-twenty year ago, but now! . . . *They have digged a pit.* Catch the men! Scare the crows, more like!"

Susanna moved at last, and Mrs. Woon's penetrating whisper sank to a mumble and died away. Susanna's unnaturally dilated eyes were set in cheeks as white as her bonnet. Laughter was banished from the faces that watched her totter down the church. Christopher, in his usual place by the door, made a sudden forward movement as she passed, but fell back before the fixed stare of her unseeing eyes.

None saw her again that day; and on the next, Bank Holiday explained the closed shutters, but not the locked door and drawn blinds. Several kind neighbours, filled to bursting with condolences and curiosity, made desperate,

almost burglarious, attempts to effect an entry, but without avail. The village dealt excitedly in rumours of bankruptcy and suicide. Towards evening, Christopher Ellery marched resolutely up to the door, knocked thrice, called aloud as many times, and retired baffled.

On Tuesday the shop opened as usual, and Susanna faced the unending stream of visitors with a brave show of composure, meeting all questions and innuendoes with an ingenuous candour that disarmed raillery. With one reservation for friendship's sake, all the inner history of Sunday's event was laid open to the world, from the first access of mad vanity to the final resolve, after two days of anguished seclusion, to face the music and live down her disgrace as best she might.

It was a busy and trying day. One regular customer did not turn up until some time after his usual hour—near closing time, in fact. The shop was empty when at last he entered. Susanna greeted him with a careful smile.

"You're a bit late to-night, Christopher. Glad to see you, but you mustn't stop long, for I'm 'most tired out, and I shall shut up directly, b'lieve. No particular news down street, s'pose?"

Who so disconcerted as Christopher, who had been priming himself for a very different reception!

"Susanna," he fumbled, "Susanna, I—you'm a good soul, Susanna. No better soul in the world, I should think. But we can't slide things over like this. We must have it out, my dear. I come in a-purpose to ask your pardon, and it's got to be done, whether you like it or no."

"It *was* a joke, then?" she asked quietly.

"Joke!" he exclaimed with bitter energy. "Ess, 'twas a joke, right enough. Trust Christopher to have his fun, in season or out, no matter who suffer by en. A brave fine joke too—one to be proud of. Old Harry's joke with the apple wadn' nothing to en, I reckon."

"You needn' be vexed," she said calmly. "I only thought I'd ask to make sure. It come into my mind that you might have been ser'ous for once. P'raps you did go just a bit too far; but you've learned me a lesson I ought to be thankful for, and thankful I am. I'm a changed woman, Christopher; I can feel the revolution in my very bones. No more man-traps on these premises, b'lieve. An old maid I am and an old maid I remain to my dying day."

"Don't 'e be so sure o' that," said Christopher with sudden emphasis. "'Twadn' only to beg your pardon that I come in to-night. I've been thinking things over since Sunday—since Saturday, p'raps—and now my mind's made up. Susanna, will 'e marry me?"

She smiled rather wearily.

"Christopher," she said, "you're incurable. Do have done with your joking."

"Joking! Had enough o' that game, b'lieve. If you'm a changed woman, I'm a changed man. I'm in dead arnest, Susanna."

She shook her head with tolerant incredulity.

"You don't believe my solemn word, Susanna? Not if I go down 'pon my knees?"

"Goodness sake, don't do that, Christopher! There an't no room in the shop, such a large man as you are. You might upset something," said she, and giggled—actually giggled! A changed woman indeed! No counterfeiter receiving his change in bad half-crowns was ever so completely discomfited as Christopher.

"Don't see nothing to laugh at," he said in injured tones. "A' honest man can ask a woman to be his wife without being made fun of, I should think."

"Make a joke, take a joke," quoth Susanna.

"'Tisn' no use, Christopher. You don't take me in no longer. I've had my lesson."

Christopher removed his hat and wiped his brow.

"Darn it all!" he muttered. "Come, Susanna," he exclaimed aloud, "don't 'e be too hard 'pon a fond old chap. I've larned my lesson too. Squeeze me dry, you won't find a quip in me."

"Now there's a humorous bit of dialogue!" she responded, smiling appreciatively. "Squeeze you dry! What a witty way you have of putting things!"

Christopher lost his temper.

"Wance more," he shouted, "and wance for all—will—you—marry me, Susanna?"

"La, Christopher! You needn' bellow like that; I can see the point all right. Can't we have our fun in quiet? I do so enjoy a bit of fun, so long as I know *'tis* a bit of fun. Go on, Christopher. 'Tis as good as a play."

But Christopher had had enough. Crushing his hat on his head, he flung forth into the night.

He was back next evening to renew his offer, with no better success. Since then he has punctually repeated it every week, in the

forlorn hope that one day he may induce Susanna to take him seriously as of yore, and return him a definite answer. Be it yes or no, he hardly cares by now, if only for one moment she can be got to believe in the sincerity of his reformation. But this, in all good-humour, she obstinately refuses to do, and his case is pitiable enough. He is losing flesh, and exhibits a growing distaste for the frivolous society of his fellow-men, preferring to meditate alone at eventide in groves and by duck-ponds, those favourite resorts of the melancholic.

As for Susanna, her business flourishes more than ever, and the little jokes she proudly produces every now and again are greatly appreciated by her customers.

A STRONG MAN

MY week at Portrewan was one of blustering gales. From south-east to south-west they shifted, and round to the north and back again, bringing rain and hail and sea-fog, and now and then some blessed hours of dazzling sunshine; but with all their changes their force never abated. The little village was in a state of suspended animation. All the winter's work was done; boats had been repaired, gear mended, nets barked; fifteen hundred new crab-pots were piled ready in the lofts; nothing remained but to await the wind's pleasure. A spell of stillness was on the place. The sea roared without, the wind whistled overhead, sometimes—but that was seldom—finding its way round the headland, and sweeping the street bare of yesterday's accumulation of litter. In the midst of the hurry and welter of the elements Portrewan reposed, silent and idle. Up the valley Nature was already at work,

heedless of her servant's rebellious bluster. The slender Cornish elms stood up in a delicate mist of ruddy purple, the blackthorn hedges were powdered with living snow, the furze-bushes were in flame, green blades and discs were pushing out from every chink in the grey stone walls, and in every sheltered spot Spring had written her name full and clear in violets, and set her primrose seal beside it. It was no time to be sitting and waiting, yet to sit and wait was Portrewan's lot.

One soon got to know the place by heart, at least in its idle aspect. One day resembled another as a pea its neighbour in the pod. The morning broke, clear or overcast, but always heralded by the sonorous matins of the gulls, circling and shouting at an incredible height above the cove. Then, as soon as the sun was up, a shambling step outside told me that the village "natural" had begun his day-long ramble. He never sat down, he seldom stood still for a moment, he never quitted the confines of the village, but as long as light remained in the sky he wandered to and fro, peeping into houses and cellars, greeting every passer-by with an uncouth chuckle, and incessantly talking, talking to himself. Greet him kindly

as you passed, and he would beg a match of you—"one little Ruby for poor Billy." Give him one, and he would strike it dexterously on his leg, and shield it in his hollowed hands until it was quite consumed, laughing and trembling with delight at the pretty flame.

Later, between six and seven o'clock, came the sound of doors unbolting and the swish of brooms on lime-ash floors. Thin threads of smoke arose from twenty chimneys. Women with their skirts tucked up appeared at the doors, taking stock of the weather and shouting shrill greetings, but postponing gossip to the idle hours. Then, at eight o'clock, each house disgorged with difficulty a small boy or girl, sleepy-eyed, white jug in hand, bound to fetch the breakfast milk from the farm on the hill. Still no sign of man, excepting Billy, and the coastguardsman striding down to breakfast from his eyrie on the cliff-top.

Now the milk-carriers returned, no longer dragging weary limbs, but chasing one another with shouts down the hill, to the imminent peril of the precious fluid. The steady pant-pant of the bellows was heard on every side, and the smoke increased in volume. Breakfast was toward. Half an hour, and the street

suddenly filled with children, and for five minutes Portrewan was lively with shrill voices and twinkling legs, till the mothers rushed out and swept their broods up the valley to school.

Then the rapt pause that precedes an event. Click of a gate. Appearance of a man, hands in pockets, white linen jumper ballooned out into a sphere by the wind, resembling nothing so much as a bloated pair of compasses. Another pause. Another man. Another, and another, and another, all with their hands in their pockets, and all converging on the life-boat house, where they met without salutation—unless indeed that was meant for salutation which the Oriental regards as the deadliest of insults—silently squared their shoulders against the door, and turned their eyes on the horizon. More men, and more, until all the shoulder-space against the house was occupied, and the row of immobile humanity extended itself along the wall of an adjacent fish-cellar. Still more, the latest comers hooking themselves in a variety of contorted attitudes over the sides of an old seine boat hard by. Then for two hours nothing save an occasional woman or dog moved in the village.

Towards midday came the only bustling

time, when the outer world invaded Portrewan in the shape of three or four tradesmen with their carts. The two rival butchers arrived from opposite directions, and drew up at opposite ends of the street. The greengrocer came rattling down the hill at a reckless rate that set his apples and potatoes dancing in their baskets. Perhaps the bootmaker from the market-town would drive up in his smart little gig, or the Johnny-come-fortnight in his lumbering van. Then the women issued forth, and voices were loud for a season. But the men stirred not, till the approach of the dinner hour was signalled to them from the chimney-tops.

The afternoon was like the morning, without its interruptions, until the children straggled home from school, and silence fled from Portrewan, to return only with returning night.

So the days passed and the wind blew till my week was up, and I left Portrewan to its idle waiting, carrying away a vivid picture of white walls and brown thatch, of handsome bearded men, comely keen-faced women, and rosy children, the loveliest ever seen, but knowing scarcely anything, save by imperfect divination, of the inner life of the place. I was

a foreigner, and towards foreigners the folk of Portrewan are silent and reserved beyond the wont even of Cornishmen. Gentlemen all, they offer no rebuff to the visitor's civil advances; they are quite ready to exchange small talk about the weather and the fishing prospects; you may even, with patience, extract a yarn or two of storm and wreck. But they never lose sight of the fact that between Cornish and English a great gulf is fixed, not to be bridged in a week or a year or a lifetime. So of Portrewan I can make no story, only a still-life picture. One figure alone moves in my memory, and that in rather a striking way; but that figure does not properly belong to Portrewan at all, and it was not until I had actually left the village behind me that a chance encounter and a casual word brought it striding out of the painted canvas into life.

The fourth morning of my visit was fine, and after breakfast I went down to the beach and found a seat on a piece of timber a little way apart from the silent assembly of sea-gazers. The children were at school; the women were afield, hanging linen to bleach on gorse and blackthorn bushes. The lazy

influence of the place was overpowering. In the general stillness whatever moved took on an exaggerated importance; the progress down street of a little black dog, sniffing and foraging after the lively fashion of his kind, was watched by twenty pair of eyes, as a great event. I watched the gulls soaring overhead, balancing themselves like rope dancers with imperceptible wing-dips on the invisible cord of rushing air, until luminous specks danced in my eyes. The rhythmic thunder of the tide on the beach throbbed like a great slow pulse within the ear, conquering thought, and reducing the brain to the same delicious apathy that ruled the body.

At eleven o'clock the spell was broken by the rattle of carts. First came the Henliston butcher, and not far behind him his rival from St. Mellyn. A Porthcool fish-jowder led a jibbing pony down the hill, crying the freshness of his mackerel as he came. The dashing greengrocer from Lankellis swooped down, standing in his cart with legs wide asunder like a Roman charioteer, scattering chickens and dogs like foam on either side, and pulling up with a magnificent abruptness. Women poured into the street; a babel of bargaining

arose and continued for a long half-hour. Then horses were whipped up, and one after another the invaders departed. The world had done with Portrewan for the day.

Not quite. Twenty minutes later, when the last faint eddy of excitement had whirled withindoors in the trail of the last woman's skirts, yet another equipage appeared round the corner at the top of the street. A very small, very cautious donkey came down the hill, stopping and firmly bracing its feet together at every step. It was harnessed to a miniature cart, or rather barrow, on which were piled some wicker baskets and a few heaps of greenstuff. And on the near-shaft, leaning backwards and nodding his head drowsily against the baskets, sat the ablest-bodied man I ever set eyes on. He was not very tall, though no doubt taller than he seemed; but his shoulders were broad to the verge of deformity, the muscles of his arms bulged immense under the sleeves of his dirty white jumper, and the jumper was stretched to rending-point across a Herculean chest. His bare head, which appeared disproportionately small on those shoulders, was covered with closely-curling black hair, slightly grizzled

about the temples. His eyes were small, sleepy, cunning; his lips full, sensuous, humorous. And down the hill he jolted towards me, his feet scraping the road, one arm hanging relaxed with open hand, the other hand loosely holding the reins, but leaving the diminutive donkey to the unfettered exercise of its own judgment.

Having carefully picked its way down the hill, the donkey stopped of its own accord on the level, sank its head, bent a knee, and lapsed into meditation. It was some time before the man stirred a limb; but at last he rolled off the shaft, stretched himself, and lounged to the back of the cart, where he picked an apple out of a basket and began to munch, leaning against the cart-wheel.

It was then that I noticed an unusual agitation among the bronze buttresses of the life-boat house. Two or three were actually standing upright and unsupported, several were exchanging remarks, and all had their eyes fixed on the man with the donkey-cart. So far as I could construe their looks, it was no unfamiliar sight they were feasting on. Wonder was not in their gaze, nor the unwinking critical scrutiny to which every stranger in Portrewan must submit. But there was admiration, if I

mistook not, and gloating pride, and something of the rapt interest with which farmers around a show-pen follow every movement of a prize ox.

Then one of the men—it was George Corin, coxswain of the life-boat—detached himself from the wall and rolled towards me. To all appearance he was ignorant of my proximity; his eyes never left the horizon, his gait was that of one starting on an aimless stroll, but for all that I knew he was going to speak to me, and I wondered what could have conquered his shy taciturnity and induced him to accost the foreigner without invitation. Even now he did not come straight up to me, but lurched stiffly against a windlass hard by, and curled himself over the handle-bar. A minute passed, and still he made no overtures. I knew enough of the ways of Portrewan to wait in patience, watching meanwhile the stranger, who had finished his apple, thrust his hands in his pockets, and gone to sleep standing.

Presently Mr. Corin, his eyes still on the sea, jerked a casual thumb in the direction of the donkey-cart, and remarked to the waves—

“Big chap, that.”

I thought he was the biggest chap I had ever seen.

"Shouldn' be frightened," said Corin. "An't many bigger chaps out of Cornwall. Nor in Cornwall nuther," he conceded after a pause.

I agreed a little too heartily, Corin looked at me suspiciously.

"Though there's lashins of big chaps in Cornwall," he said.

This time the heartiness of my agreement struck the right note. Corin turned a more favourable eye on me, and sidled up closer.

"Could 'e give a guess, now, who that chap might be?" he asked.

I hadn't a notion, and said so. Corin bated his breath.

"That's Theophilus Pennywarn."

I suppose my astonishment was too obviously factitious, for Corin regarded me with an aggrieved expression.

"Don't believe you ever heard tell of him," he said. "Theophilus Pennywarn, that won the Belt two year running."

"What belt?" I asked incautiously, and sank for ever in Corin's estimation. For a moment he seemed disinclined to waste any more words on me. Then he relented.

"Champion belt," he explained pityingly. "Cornwall and Devon. For wrastling."

My endeavour to express intense interest passed muster, and the softened Corin continued.

"There edn' a man in this town that Theophilus couldn' pick up with one hand and shake the nature out of 'm. And two year running 'a held the Belt. Throwed Jacob Treskilly, and big Ben Rutter up Bodmin, and the pick of the Devon men beside. Not one of 'em had a chance with Theophilus, and two year running he held the Belt."

I was so injudicious as to ask who beat him the third year. Corin snorted contemptuously.

"Beat en! Beat Theophilus! There wadn' a man alive could do that. Nor there edn' a man alive could do it now, for all he's twenty year older than what 'a was then. Beat Theophilus? No, no! Nobody bet en, then nor since. He give the Belt up of his own self—resigned it, as you may say."

Naturally I wanted to know why.

"Chap dursen' use his strength," said Corin impressively.

Again I asked why. Corin waxed eloquent.

"Look!" he exclaimed, pointing a dramatic finger at the slumbering hero. "There's a pair of arms to be 'levering broc'lo and taties and apples by the pint and by the quart and

by the gallon! Selling greens—edn' that a mean trade for the strongest man in Cornwall? All that power and all those shoulders wasting theirselves 'pon cabbages—edn' that a wisht malincholy sight for 'e? But 'a don't dare do no more, and there's danger for 'm in that. 'How?' you ask; and I'll tell 'e.

"The second year Theophilus wrastled for the Belt, the match was up to Plymouth. When the news come to St. Mellyn that he'd won—St. Mellyn being his locality where he was reared to—the St. Mellyn chaps concluded to pitch one o' these here celebrations agin he come home. And so they did—met the train with a four-horse carriage, and escoorted of him home, holl'ing and singing, flags flying and brass band a-playing; and after that, they finished up with a feast in Wesley schoolroom—none o' your ninepenny tays, but a reg'lar beef and pork-wine banket. Nothing wadn' too good for Theophilus when he'd won the Belt and bet the Devon chaps 'pon their own ground. And then they drunk his health and cheered en till they couldn' cheer no more.

"Then Theophilus got up, looking brave and solemn. 'Neighbours,' 'a said, 'here stand I in the midst of joy and thanksgiving. And

what's the state of my feelings in the midst of joy and thanksgiving? Dust and ashes is their state,' says he. 'Friends and comrades,' says he, 'glory's holler trade arter all; and as for thanksgiving, 'tis nothing but a sheep's bladder—wan teeny pin 'll do fur 'n. And I've got the pin handy,' says Theophilus, stopping and looking round 'pon the comp'ny, and if he'd dropped the pin he was telling of, you'd heard en fall. 'Men of St. Mellyn,' says he, 'I've fought my last fight and wrastled my last throw, and Cornwall must fit and search for another champion.'

"Well, there was a terrible to-do then, as yon may think. 'Twas *How, Theophilus?* and, *What's mane, Theophilus?* and, *Art mazed, Theophilus?*—all holl'ing 'pon him to once. Then he put up his hand. 'Comrades,' 'a said, 'hark to my murnful tale.' And then 'a told 'em how when the wrastling was done 'a felt a queer mazy sort of pain inside, like a hand was squeezing his heart. Didn' pay no 'tention at first, but it got worse and worse, till he couldn' stand, set, nor go. So 'a said to himself—'What's up with 'e, Theophilus? Better-fit you go see for a doctor.' So 'a did, and found one not fur off—reg'lar quality doctor, brass

plate, red lamp, spaking-tubes all complete. 'Doctor,' says he, 'my heart do ache.' 'Who's the maid?' says doctor. 'No maid,' says Theophilus. 'Tis indigestion, 'a b'lieve. Gie me some strong trade, will 'e?' 'Pon that, doctor out with his stathescope and took an observation 'pon Theophilus's chest. 'Hullo!' says he. 'Tell 'e what, my man; you'd best be brave and careful. Your heart's diseased, and there an't no doctor's trade in the world to cure that. You'm toler'ble safe, though, so long as you don't exert yourself. Keep out o' fights and wrastling matches, don't gie way to anger, don't go lifting no heavy weights, and you'll be an old man 'fore die. You'm a strong man, so beware of your strength. Make use of en too much, and soon or late you drop, and so I warn 'e. And my fee's five shelling,' says he, holding out his hand. 'But I've just won the Belt!' says Theophilus. 'I mustn' give in without a fight, or me and Cornwall's disgraced for ever!' 'Now, now!' says doctor. 'Don't 'e get excited, and don't holler; edn' nothing more dangerous. And wrastle another throw arter what I've told 'e, and 'tis suicide, no less, and I'll see you don't get no Christian burial, mind that. And my fee's five shelling,' says

he, holding out his hand. So Theophilus paid en and come away.

"That's what Theophilus told the men of St. Mellyn at the feast they made for him, and turned all their joy to murning. And since that day 'a haven' dared use his strength to fight with nor yet to work with. He fit and bought a dunkey and cart, and pitched selling greens, being the lightest trade 'a could think for, and he've been selling greens ever since."

I gazed with heightened interest at the fallen hero. He was still in the same attitude, leaning against the cart with his hands in his pockets and his eyes half closed. Nobody had come to buy of him, nor had he made the slightest effort to dispose of his goods. I remarked as much to Corin.

"Well, 'tis like this," he explained. "He's a' independent sort of chap; don't come here, nor nowhere else, not reg'lar; only when he've a mind to. And gen'rally, when 'a *do* come, 'tis after the reg'lar man have been, and there an't much business left for Theophilus. But he don't care; you may buy off of him or not; he won't put himself out for nobody. Edn' proud, nuther; always ready for a chat or a glass—glass in p'tic'lar."

I suppose I smiled at this, and Corin realised that he had been guilty of an indiscretion in exposing a fellow-countryman's failing to the stranger, for suddenly his communicative mood dried up. He grunted shortly and moved off. I remained, with a fascinated eye on Theophilus.

Five minutes passed, and he shifted his weight from left leg to right. Three more, and he blinked twice as the sun began to shine into his eyes. Then, after a decent interval, he dragged a huge hand out of a tight pocket, and pulled his cap over his brow. The hand went back to the mouth of the pocket, fumbled there for a moment, and dropped limp, at the same instant that Theophilus's head dropped forward on his breast.

A woman bustled out of a door and bore down upon him. She touched his elbow, and he raised his head without indecent haste. I could plainly hear the colloquy that ensued, and thus it ran—

“Any new pertates, Mr. Pennywarn?”

“Ess, 'a b'lieve, my dear.”

“Good ones?”

“Well, my dear, 'tis my business to sell 'em. I don't set up for no judge consarnin the

ateing of 'em. See for yourself. In one o' they flaskets up front, b'lieve."

The woman rummaged, found the right basket, and scanned its contents.

"Rather old for new pertates, ben't they?"

"Dare say you'm right, my dear."

"How much are 'e looking for, Mr. Pennywarn?"

"Aw, just the reg'lar price hereabouts."

"What's that?"

"You should know better'n I do, my dear."

"I give eightpence last time I bought any," said the woman doubtfully. "But they'd got more nature in 'em than these, I seem."

"Shouldn' wonder," said Theophilus, and yawned.

"If I knowed they wouldn' go watery in the pot, I don't know but I'd try half a gallon."

"Well, my dear, if I'd made 'em, I might warrant 'em; but as 'tis, I can't do no such thing."

The woman fingered a tuber, glanced at Theophilus, whose eyes had already closed again, hesitated, and said—

"Well, I can but try them. A gallon, please, Mr. Pennywarn."

"The measure's a-top of the rhubarb," said Theophilus, without offering to move. "Meas-

ure 'em out for yourself, and you'm sure to get a fair allowance."

She did as shewas bid, turned the potatoes into her apron, told the money into his disengaged hand, and went off, leaving him to resume his siesta, and me to reflect admiringly on his remarkable way of doing business. The dinner-hour interrupted my meditations, and when I returned to the beach, Theophilus, donkey, and cart had disappeared.

I saw no more of him at Portrewan, but he occupied my thoughts a good deal. The real pathos of his story was so apparent through the grotesqueness of its setting. Corin was right ; it was piteous to see a man endowed with such abundance of strength, and debarred by a death penalty from exercising it. No gift of nature is so welcome, or yields such intoxicating delight in the use, and the use was forbidden him for life. One could imagine the fret and chafe of dammed-up energy, the wild recurrent temptation to whistle prudence down the wind and do one deed worthy of his power and fame. One pictured him, Bible on knee, pondering the story of Samson and his heroic end. One sketched a story, still more heroic than Samson's, where the end came in a blaze

of supreme effort, not from Samson's revengeful motive, but to save some life from deadly peril. One realised his feelings as he left the doctor's presence, crushed and bowed under the fatal sentence. And with what loathing must he regard the petty occupation to which he was doomed ! A steam-hammer is sometimes made to crack a nut by way of diversion ; imagine a steam-hammer endowed with sentience and the pride of life, and set to crack nuts perpetually !

It is true that now and again, as I pursued my imaginary analysis of a brave soul at odds with fate, a disturbing image would intrude itself of a lazy careless vagabond leaning against a cart-wheel, munching apples and drowsing in the sun ; and I would be conscious of a certain incongruity. Yet, if I know anything of the Cornish folk, the man must feel as I imagined him to feel. A visible danger he might face with a light heart, but no child of his race could live contented and careless under such bizarre conditions, with the spectre of sudden death dogging his steps wherever he went. He must have his dark hours, though not a line on his face betrayed them.

My time was up. The day of departure

was fine, and I resolved to make the ten miles to civilisation on foot. Half-way through the journey I came to a solitary little wayside inn. Before the door stood Theophilus Pennywarn's donkey and cart, and, as luck would have it, Theophilus himself lounged out just as I passed. Presently I heard the patter of the donkey's hoofs behind me. I slowed down, and Theophilus and I exchanged greetings. His face was flushed, and he exhaled a rich aroma of beer.

We were just at the foot of a hill. The donkey slackened its pace, and its master and I fell into conversation as we trudged up side by side. Theophilus was communicative, not to say garrulous, under the benign influence of ale. In two minutes we were great friends. Presently my chance came, and I dropped a casual remark about wrestling. Theophilus turned his full face on me, and his eyes twinkled.

"You'm right," he said. "'Tedn' what 'a was in my young days, more's the pity."

I made a complimentary reference to his early prowess. He fetched a sigh, but his eyes still twinkled.

"Ess, well," said he, "those days are over.

They make me sad to think upon. You've heard my murnful tale, s'pose?"

I had indeed. I ventured on condolences. Theophilus checked a beery chuckle with another portentous sigh.

"Terrible, edn'a?" he said with excellent dolefulness. "There wouldn' be many 'ud keep up their sperits in my place, would 'em, now? They often come to me and say— 'Theophilus, how are you so cheerful? Dostn' mind how the shadder of death's a-hanging over 'e all the while? Dostn' feel shame for the mean trade you'm forced to work to?' That's how they do talk. But I say to 'em— 'Look-see,' says I; 'we've all got our burdens in this sinful world. Ess,' I say, 'tis our doom to carr' the waters of affliction, some in milk-jugs and some in beer-barrels. 'Tis a reg'lar puncheon with me, but you needn' grieve for me. My shoulders are brave and broad.' That's what I say to 'em. Nobody ever heard me holl'ing; I an't that sort. Maybe I should get the doldrums now and agin, same as other people, and more reason, p'raps, but I an't one to make a show of 'em."

Now I began to understand Theophilus, and to respect and admire him as he surely deserved,

for the simple dignity of his attitude under the frowns of fortune. I endeavoured to express my sentiments in becoming terms.

"Thank'e," he said. "'Tis kind for 'e to say so." Then he fell into a silence, which lasted, punctured with one or two suppressed chuckles, till we reached the top of the hill. Here the road branched and our ways separated. I said good-bye, expressing my regret that we should probably never meet again. And so we parted.

I had not gone ten steps when he called me back.

"Look now," he said. "Did I understand for 'e to say you was leaving these parts?"

I explained that I was returning to London.

"For good? You won't be coming back here-along no more?"

It was very unlikely, I said. Theophilus eyed me steadily.

"How shouldn' I?" he said, half to himself. "Kept it to myself all these years; but a lonesome joke edn' much of a joke after all. So I will."

He looked cautiously round, took my hand, and laid it against his huge chest, just over his heart.

"Feel that," he whispered. "Sound as a bell!"

"What!" I exclaimed. "Do you mean to say——"

"Never wadn' nothing the matter wed 'n!" he said, and burst into a roar of laughter.

"And the doctor at Plymouth?"

"Never went to no doctor in my life. What should chap like me want with doctors?"

"Then why on earth——?"

"Look," said he, turning up his sleeve and displaying a hairy arm on which the muscles stood up in great lumps. "There's the strongest arm in Cornwall this day. Something to be proud of, edn'a? So you think. What a grand thing, says you, to be so strong as any three! With an arm like that, you'd say, there an't nothing a man could look for, but what he can get 'n. Glory! Honour! Dominion! Power!"—and at each sounding word he dealt the arm a vicious smack. "That's what you do say. And what do I say that the arm belong to? I say, strength like mine's a curse to a quiet easy-going chap like me—nothing but a curse. Look-see, now. Before I went to Plymouth that time, I worked over to the

quarries, and if I did one man's work, I did four, and all along o' my strength. If there should be a great big stone to shift that nobody else couldn' move, 'twas always the same old yarn—' Liv en to Theophilus; *he'll* see fur 'n.' If a cart should get oversot—' Aw, liv en be, you chaps. Where's Theophilus? *He'll* put en to rights.' And when I'd finished up my work, 'twas just as bad. Maybe I'm for a quiet touch-pipe by the fire: but no! Here's Aunt Jane Eddy's nevvie and nace home for a visit. In they come. ' This here's Theophilus,' says Aunt Jane. ' Ded 'e ever be'old such a tremenyous chap? Would 'e mind bending the poker, Theophilus, for my nevvie and nace to see?' Or p'raps I should stroll down to cove after tay, to see the men haul up the boats. Then 'twas—' Lend a hand, Theophilus, thou great lazy rogue!' And soon 's I set finger 'pon the windlass, all the rest 'ud give over and stand gasping and glazing to see me haul en up all by myself. And so 'a was, always the same all the while wherever I went. I'd better been born a horse, for all the thanks or profit I got out o' my strength. And me a quiet chap, that like to take things easy! So one day—'twas in the train coming home from Plymouth

that time—I said to myself—‘Theophilus,’ I said, ‘you’d better go and break your arm to once; then you’ll have some peace.’ Well, I didn’ want to go quite so fur ’s that, but after thinking a bit I made a plan. You know what ’a was. They swallowed my yarn as if ’twas a dish of crame and they a passel of cats, and I haven’ had no trouble from that day to this. Why, you wouldn’ believe—but if they should see me going to use my strength, lifting or pulling things, they’ll come running up with—‘Here, Theophilus, I’ll do that li’ll job for ’e’—for fear I should drop before their eyes. ’Tedn’ often I got to load my li’ll cart myself, I can tell ’e. Always somebody ready and proud to lend a hand to poor Theophilus. Aw, ’tis grand! Many’s the laugh I’ve had!”

He laughed now, the reprobate!—his mighty shoulders shaking, the tears standing in his cunning little eyes. And I had to laugh too, in spite of the vexation with which I recalled the sympathy I had wasted on the lazy rascal. Sheer laziness—there was nothing else the matter with him. And for twenty years this huge impostor had lolled on his throne, receiving tribute, sniffing incense. It was scandalous; yet what could I do but laugh?

THE LUCUBRATIONS OF THYRZA THEOPHILA

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The Religious Tract Society.]

A PRIMITIVE POT

THE following letters were originally addressed to the editor of a certain Cornish weekly newspaper. I am informed that they did not come through the post, but were delivered by hand. Every Thursday a burly young fisherman rolled into the advertisement office of the *St. Kenna Mercury*, extracted a crumpled epistle from the folds of his guernsey, fixed the nearest clerk with a severe eye, thumped the letter down on the desk before him, and rolled out again, having spoken no word. The letters, to which a faint odour of herrings still clings, are written in a fair round hand, and the only obscurities calling for editorial elucidation are caused by the blots and smudges, which are profuse and impenetrable. These being disposed of, there remained the delicate questions of spelling and punctuation. Here, as well as in the arrange-

ment of capital letters, the writer has not conformed to general usage; and at first, with the editorial fever hot upon me, I proposed to remedy this, by substituting the current orthography, breaking up the breathless periods into more manageable lengths, and making a general redistribution of capital honours. But a careful study of the documents has led me to modify my plans to a considerable extent.

Unprejudiced students of literature must admit that since the adoption of a uniform system of orthography, the printed page has lost much of its former variety and picturesqueness, while gaining little, if anything, in legibility. Literature, I would humbly submit, is an art; the artist's materials are words; and the more plastic his materials, the wider his scope of effect. As it is, with all the liberties at present permitted, how hard it is for a writer to express all the shades of meaning he has in mind! Words are stubborn things, we say; they were not so until the dictionary-maker cast them in his iron mould. Take a letter written by one of the persons we are pleased to term illiterate, and note with what admirable fitness and fluidity the spelling varies with the writer's mood, how vividly it illuminates the

drab commonplace of trite phrases, how easily and sufficiently it degrades or ennobles a word at pleasure by the mere addition or subtraction of a single letter. However, since readers in this hurried and mechanical age are impatient above all of too much originality, I have reluctantly modified my author into a partial compliance with present orthographic usage, abolishing all merely accidental variations, while carefully retaining every jot and tittle that makes for beauty, character, or emphasis.

As to stops. Our elaborate system of punctuation is useful enough in cases where close and involved arguments have to be set forth, but for the purposes of brisk narrative it is unnecessary. The great Alexander Dumas, prince of story-tellers, has put it on record that his manuscript was entirely innocent of punctuation; stops, etc., were only added on the printed proof, as a concession to literary prejudice. In the following pages the full stops alone are due to the author. For the commas, quotation marks, and other superfluous points, the editor is solely responsible. The semicolon, that mark of the literary beast, he has taken care to eschew altogether.

Lastly, with reference to the use of capital

letters, I would ask the reader to glance at the matter below, and compare its lively and pictorial appearance with the dull and formal monotony of this introduction. Let him mark, too, that the capitals are not scattered haphazard, but serve a definite artistic purpose. They are hardly ever used except for singling out the important word. Our absurd custom confines their use chiefly to the first word of the sentence—generally an unimportant article or conjunction, and for emphasis we must have recourse to the clumsy and disfiguring device of italics. And, finally, why should we alone among the nations proclaim our egotism by investing the first person singular pronoun with an importance denied to its fellows? Our “illiterate” friend is more modest and logical, though here again custom and prejudice have proved too strong for me, and I have reluctantly substituted the arrogant *I* for the humble lower-case letter that appears throughout the original manuscript.

The matter of the letters needs no preface; let it speak for itself forthwith.

I

“DEAR MR,—I write these Few lines hoping to fine you Well as it leave me at

Presant. Dear mr, I see some Potry on your Exlant paper, I have wrote some Potry, shall I send it to your Paper? I am only a Servant but servants can write so well as Ladys, why not? some people do think servants haven got no Fealing, they treat us worse than Doggs, its Shamfull the way they treat us. Dear mr, I dont say a Word agin my Mrs, she is deffrant, a True Lady though not Rich but very Kind, what be Riches put them agin a Kind Heart? My mrs allow Jan to come and Court me in the Kitchen evary night when he dont go to Sea, Jan is my Betroathd, been courting of me sence I done my Hair up 2 year come nex Easter. Jan take this letter to you, cant Afford no Stamp, Jan say it ant Worth no stamp nuther, he say—‘What for you want to write Potry, I dont see no Sence in Potry without its Hymns.’ Dear mr, I be very Fond of Jan, he have a True heart but not Clever, he dont Understand about potry, this is Soar Tryall to me, we must Endevar to bear our Earthy tryals with Patent heart.

“Dear mr, please tell me what you pay your Pots for writeing your Potry, please Inform me do you pay them by the Peace, please leave me Know do you pay More for a Long peace, some

of my peaces is longer than Others. I have made a Long peace about the Great Hoshean how it Roll about all the while, how it Roar up agin the Clifts like Wild Lions, the Tender maiden hear it in the night, she Tremble thinking upon her Betroathd hauling Crab Pots out of the Greedy Jawes of the Rageing Oshean, this is my Longest peace but in Short metar, shall I send it? Dear mr I will now conclude from yours Respectably

“THYRZA THEOPHILA TROUNCE.”

II

“DEAR MR,—I am the Pot what wrot to you last week, please will you answer Soon. Dear mr, I would send you a Spesamen Peace for you to see, but Jan have Forbid me, he say these Citty people is all Rogs, if you got my peace Jan say you would put it on your paper and not Pay me, please Forgive Jan for speaking so Rude, I dont doubt but what you be Honest as the Day, but Jan dont hold with Citty folk, wonce a city man Cheated Jan over some Fish, he dont forgive easy, Jan dont, nor yet forget. Relligeon do tell us we must forgive 70 time 7 which come to a Brave lot when you reckon it Upp, Jan do say thats the

Hardest thing about religeon, he say even the School Board dont larn us further than 12 times. I am Primitive, some here is primitive some church some wesley, why cant us be all 1 relligeon? primitive is Best, this is my Humble Apinean. Mrs is kind but Church, she dont hold with primitives writeing potry, but I say if church pots why not Primitive pots?

"Dear mr, I dont say a Word agin my mrs, she is most Considrat, not Jallous only Prowd, she dont like to see Ink on my fingers when I take up the Dishes, ink be Terrable stuff, it do get Every where, it spile my Gownds, Jan dont like that, he is terrable Paticlcr, so is mrs. Jan say to me—'Potry be Foolishness and make you all of a Mess, so Why write potry?' he say.

"Dear mr, Jan dont Understand, it makes me Unhappy some times because he dont understand what it is to be a Pot. Some times the words at the end wont Match, this is a sad Tryal, some times the lines do come too Long for the paper some times too short till I dont know what to Do by them, and then Jan come in and I feel Teasy, dont treat him Proper, so then he say—'Potry be bad for the Temper, so why write potry?' he say.

"Dear mr, I have made a peace about the

Primitives for your paper, it do Crack them
 Upp consedrabable, please are you primitive, if
 not I wont send it, not wishing to Affend,
 trusting to here from you Soon and no more
 at presant from yours truthfully

“THYRZA THEOPHILA TROUNCE.”

III

“DEAR MR,—I hope you get my Letters
 what I send you about the Potry, Jan say he
 give them to the most Raspectable man he see
 in your Office, I hope he give them to You, I
 hope you will Anser when Conveanant, Jan
 bring you a Bokay of Flowers with this letter,
 I hope you will Like them, Mrs have a Beauty-
 full Garden full of Hansam flowers, she allow
 me to walk in the garden and gather the
 flowers, this is Kind, I Love the flowers, they
 smell so Hansam they look so Pretty, there is
 Roses lilies jilly flowers jiranums, many others
 too Numarous to Relate, letter paper being
 Expencive, the woman that keep the Shop
 here is a Great Rog, she Appress poor people,
 charge 1d for 3 sheet paper 3 envalop 1 dinky
 Scrapp of Blotten paper what wont Blott,
 Shame upon her I say, whats the Use of
 blotten paper as wont Blott?

“Dear mr, I have made up a Peace about the Flowers, shall I send it? I read it to Jan, so he say—‘All very well, the peace say flowers is Pretty, I know That, and then it tell what Lovely things the flowers be, you sayd that Before, whats the Use of saying it Agin, every body do know flowers is pretty also lovely, if you haven got nothing Oreggenal to tell us why write Potry?’ he say.

“Dear mr, Jan do make Funn of my potry but I think he’s Prowd after that to think he’s betroathd to a Pot, he often sit and watch me writeing, he think I write Splendid, I hope you like my writing, I am Orphan but well brought up, Sad to be Orphan but I got Much to be Thankfull for, you’m Bound to be orphan some time if you live Long anough, I dont mind my Mother, she died when a Baby, I got her Picture, I think by her picture she ad a Soft Voice, I never heard it to Remember, Father died 10 year ago, he was Rope Maker by trade, put his Arnings in a Bank, the bank broke, that broke fathers Heart allso, dear mr I dont Understand about these banks, I think its best to put your money in a Stocken, if the stocken break you can Mend it, but not a Bank.

“Dear mr please write Soon and leave me know about the Potry from yours Truthfully

“THYRZA THEOPHILA TROUNCE.”

IV

“DEAR MR,—I hoapt to get a Hanser from you about the Potry but it haven come not yet. Jan do think you keep your pots in your Office and pay them Reglar Wages to write your potry, my wages here is 7 pound, I am Anxous to Better myself, when you want a New pot I am ready to come for 10 pound and would Cook and Wash beside, please leave me know Soon so I could give Notice and would come when my Month was up if Agreeble.

“Dear mr there was a peace in your Valuble paper about the Moon, I have Allso made a peace about the moon, in my peace it say how Lovely she do shine of a Night when no Clowds about, so Jan say—‘Well what of That? if the moon hapt to shine Day time that be Worth putting on the paper but she dont do no such Thing so why Trouble about her?’ Jan be good Fisherman but haven got no Lettratur, some times we should go for a Stroal on the Clifts of a Heavning, I say to Jan—

‘How Grand the Hoschean do look, Ide like to step into a Boat and sail acrost the Mighty Oshan for Ever,’ so Jan say to me—‘You’d be brave and ill before Long,’ he say. Alass no Potry about Jan, he think potry be all very well for Females, but he say Give Mee crab pots, when he say this he reach out his Arm, Jan’s reckand the Strongest man in these parts, also very Steady, my mrs say to me—‘Thyrza, you’m a Lucky maid to get such a Steady chap, and as for Letrature, why 2 pots in 1 Famaly be 1 too Many,’ she say.

“Dear mr, I dont want to Hurry you but wish for Esteamed Answer about the potry Soon, time be on the Wing, you Never know when the Ends coming, it say in the Copy Book best not put off to Day what you cant do to Morrow, much Sound Doctrine in these Copy books, I shoulde be frighten if Solomon ad a Hand in Concocting them, he was Wise but Bitter agin the Women nor I dont wonder, when you come to marry 700 wives youm Bound to get 1 or 2 Light Carecters into your Famaly, a man in these parts been marryed 4 times, they call him King of the Widow Men, I think he’s a Mean Uggly little chap, wouldn say Thank you for im my self but

theres Some maids is ready to go to the Halter with any Thing that wear Trowses, though as many Wrenkles on is face as Figgures in the Almanack.

“Dear mr, please think over what I have said about the Potry and Cooking and no more at Presant from yours respectably

“THYRZA THEOPHILA TROUNCE.”

V

“DEAR MR,—if you would send me some Paper like you give your Pots to write on I should be much Abliged, these little dinky Sheats ben’t Fitt to write Good potry on, if you would send some Bigg Thick sheats with Lines ruled on them then I could write Better potry, my pen go through this Thin stuff when I get Axcsited over my potry and then the Nibb get cross and Splatter the Ink all about, this is a Soar Tryal, when the nib get Cross you must throw it away and fit a New one, the nibs here is 4 a penny, the woman that keep the shop is a Scandlous Roag.

“Dear mr, potry be a Big Expence what with nibs paper ink and Atsetary, so I cant Afford to send my potry Gratus, but if you pay me 6d a peace that would be Safishant,

I tell Jan this, so he say—‘Well if Thats all you get then to My mind potry be a Poor trade, washing dishes do pay better and dont Mucky your Gownds and Fingers so,’ he say.

“Dear mr, I hope you will Excuse mistakes in Spelling if any, I got a Dictanory father give me when a little maid, but was Sadly Ignarant in they days, never thought to turn out a Pot, so I teared out the Leafs to curl my Hair with, so now only the End left, it begin from V and go to Z, these end letters not much use, paticular X and Z, Potry come Easy to me but spelling Dont, if you put my potry on your paper you can Alter the spelling if agreable but please not to alter the Potry, my last peace is about the Birds, it tell how Sweet the birds do sing on the Treecs, it tell how Quick they fly about the Edges, then it say—‘Ide like to be A happy Bird to sing so Free And fly all day from tree to Tree,’ I read this peace to Jan, so he say—‘Dont agree with e There, more like you’d lie down and Groan all day if you got to feed on Raw Worms.’

“Dear mr, I dont say but what Jan is Right some times about the potry, its Hard to speak Truth when you want to Match your

words, the words put all Kind of things in your head what you never Intend and then you wonder how they come there, yours truthfully THYRZA THEOPHILA TROUNCE."

VI

"DEAR MR,—I see your paper Reglar every Week, mrs give it me to light fire with, I read so much of it as I can, I Alwes read the Story, also the Fishing and Murders to tell Jan, that's all he care about, dear mr I like your paper, I think it do you Credit, I wonder where you get all your News from, Wonderful what a Lot of news do come about every Week, I alwes cut out the Potry before I light fire, this is not Stealing nor doing Wrong, I ask Preacher is it wrong to cut out Potry before you light fire, so he say—'No, not if you can light fire so well Without the potry.'

"Dear mr, your pots be Clever chaps, they spell Wonderfull, once I wrote a Story but it came Exspencive for paper, can't Afford to write no more storys, only Potry, I am the Only pot now living in these parts that I know by, my Uncle's wife once wrote a Hymn about Judgment Day, she was Church, so she ask Parson to allow Quire to sing it in Church, it was 8

and 6 Meter, but he say—‘No no, too much Brimstone in that hymn, I dont Approve of such Warm Doctrine,’ and then she was that Vext she leave church and turn Bible Christian, I dont hold with leaving the Religeon you been brought up to, she was a Vishous temper poor woman, she’s dead now, Jan do say she was the Only pot he ever came acrost beside Me and he say he dont think Much of the Breed, dear mr he dont Mean nothing by it, he is very Fond of me but love is Joak, I ham a Searous turn of Mind myself, in the Story I wrote the end was Sad, the good chap died the Bad chap died and last of all the Maid died also and they Buryed her on Topp of her Betroathd, so Jan say to me—‘Too much Sematary about your storys Thyrza, please dont write no More, they ben’t Healthy.’ Jan dont think Much of story books, all Lies, he say, plenty True tales going round, so why write Lies, too much Courting in these storys he say, it makes him Sick to hear tell so much about Courting, Kiss and dont Tell, thats His maxam.

“Dear mr, you haven wrote to say if you want my potry, if you kindly write I will send a Free Sampal, I have made a peace about

Winter, it tell how Sad to see the pretty Leafs falling, it say how Retched you feel to see them fall, it make you think upon Death, I read this peace to Jan, so he say—‘What, more Seme-tary? if potry make you feel like That why write potry?’ Jan alwes be Cheerfull, he laugh a Deal, know a lot of Joaks, every body do say Jan’s good Company though he haven got no Letrature, some got 1 Gift some Another, if we was all Alike we shoulden get on so com-fable I sopose.

“Dear mr this be a Tejous long letter, will now draw to a Close hoping you keep Tolable from yours truthfully

“THYRZA THEOPHILA TROUNCE.”

VII

“DEAR MR,—I write to tell you the Varous peaces I got in Stock so you can Chuse which peace you would Prafer for me to send you, would you like a peace about Spring? I got Numarous peaces about spring, this be Fine subjeck for Potry, the words match easy, I begun to be Pot in the Spring time, it was like this, I wolk out onc day, see the Vilets and Pimmy Roses in the Edges, hear the Black birds and Gray birds whissling, that make me

feel like I want Something but dont know What, then the words begun to Match their selfs in my Head, so I say out loud—‘How Pleasant in Spring is Every Thing the Birds do Sing the Grass do Grow the Flowers do Blow where Ever you Go’—that was my First peace, it come by it self, then I knowd I was Pot, dear mr, I ham not Prowd, tis a Gift, you can larn to Roast and Bile but Not to make Potry, that come by Nature, Aspecially in the Spring time, Jan say to me—‘Do it now? well so does Pimples, tell e what it is Thyrza, if I was you Ide keep a bottle of Cooling Medacin by me to take when I feel the Potry coming on,’—thats how Jan do talk, I try not to Mind him when he talk like That.

“Dear mr, I always be Carefull to make the words Match in my potry, sometimes in the Hymns the words do match so fur as the Spelling do go but when you come to Sing them they Dont match at all, this look to me like Daceat, I dont think there Ought to be daceat in Relligion.

“Dear mr, my mrs have got a Book, it is called by the name of Milton, she Say it is Potry, she is Truthfull Lady, would Scorn to tell a Lie, I have read the book, much Sollam

reading in it took out of Scredtur but I dont think the man have larnt his Besness propper, None of the words dont Match, also too many Bad Carecters in the book, I never knowed there was so many Devils about.

“Dear mr, I have Also made sevrall peaces about Love, love be Wondarfull thing, very Conformable to potry but not anough words to Match, when you write about Love youm Bound to say it come from Above like a Dove and then you dont know what to say Else, if you could send me some More words to match with Love I would be much Gratafyed to you, have tryed Shove and Glove, but too Low for Potry, no more at present from yours Truthfully

“THYRZA THEOPHILA TROUNCE.”

VIII

“DEAR MR,—please never mind writing to me about the Potry, Jan’s Uncle died Suddant last week through drinking Furnichar Polesh by Mistake for Rum, he use to drink Terrable but ad a Kind heart, he leave Jan 50 pound some Massive Picsures also a Stufft Badger in glass case, so Jan mean to go Shares with is Brother in a Drift Boat, he say he will be out Driving all the week so no time for Courting so

why not get Married to wonce, 'but Mind,' he say, 'I ben't going to have no Inky potry about the House to Mucky my new Wife and my new Furnichar, mind that, Potry be all very well for Maidens but not Propper for Married women to give Way to it,' he say.

"Dear mr, I find it Hard to give up being Pot, Jan say I must Burn all my potry, this is Cruall Hard, but Steady young men is Scairce in these parts, plenty maidens ready to snatch at Jan if I dont have im, and a Poor lot they be too for all theyr Smart Gownds.

Dear mr, I am Young but not Too young to marry, can make Pastys so well as Any body, its never safe to Put the men Off, I can tell you a Yearn about that, there was a man in these parts courted a woman 30 Year and Slighted her after that, it was like this, he ask her to Marry him, so she say—'Wait a bit till you get On a bit,' so he go off and get on a Bitt, then she say—'Wait till you get on a bit More,' so he get on a bit more, Then she an't Satisfyed, so she say—'You haven got on Enough to my mind,' so he go off and get on some more, then he get on a Brave Lott, get very Rich, then she's not Good enough for him, so he Leave her and marry a Born Lady, this

should be a Warning to all Maidens not to be Greedy but marry First chance they get if a Steady young man like my Jan.

“When I am marryd I will Endeavar to be Obeadent to my Usbant and not write Potry but its Hard, Jan dont Understand how Hard tis, but I must not Complain, Jan’s very Good, I am Thankfull to get such Good Husbant.

“Dear mr, I wish to Thank you for Kindness reading my Letters, if you could a put only 1 of my peaces on your paper I would a been Prowd to see my name on your Estamable paper, I tell this to Jan, so he say—‘Prowd, yes I beleave e, not to say Stuck Upp, but never mind little maid you Shall have your name on the paper all the Same,’ so I say—‘How my name on the paper?’ so he say—‘Why, in with the Rest of the Marredges and what More do a maiden want?’ he say.

“Dear mr, I will now Conclude for the Last time with Best Respect in which Jan do join and no more from yours Respectably

“THYRZA THEOPHILA TROUNCE.”

FURTHER COMMUNICATIONS FROM THYRZA THEOPHILA

AFTER a considerable interval, the editor of *The St. Kenna Mercury* has again been favoured with a series of communications from Thyrza Theophila, now no longer a Trounce, but a Lelean. It will be seen that the lady has not altogether renounced her literary aspirations ; but married life has sobered them, and it is no longer as a Poet, but as a Journalist that she would shine. For the rest, it appears that no change of nature has followed on her change of state. She is still the same sensible, sentimental, sententious Thyrza as before.

I

“DEAR MR,—I dont know if you mind me, I wrote you some Letters before I Enter Mattry-money, I wrote about my Poetry, you diden Answer me nor I dont Wonder, my Spelling was Hoffal in those days, I am Ashamed to think how Bad my spelling was, ‘Hears a Hingarent maid,’ says you, ‘she think she can

write Poetry and she go and spell it Potry, how do she Expect to make the words Match if she dont Spell them proper ?'

"Dear mr, dont be Frighten, I haven made no more Poetry, not sence I got Marryed, dont get no Time what with Jan and Baby, dear mr, I take up my Pen to say we be doing Nicely here, Baby got 4 Teeth and begin to Talk propper, say 'Da' to Jan, cant get im to say Ma yet, I ham not Jallous, Babys name is John Charles Edward, Jan think its 2 too Many, Whose going to call him all that? but Baby got a Consedrabable Parcel of Aunts, all wishing to put a Finger in the Chrestning Bowl, they chuse a name and feel Slighted if you say—'No, that's too Grand.'

"Dear mr, I wont be so Rude to ask are you Marryed and got a Baby, I hope so, it is Great Blessing to be marryd and have a Fond little baby, dear mr please Ascuse me, I begin to talk about Baby to wonce when I take up my Pen to write something Deffrant, dear mr it is like This, I see on your Intellagent Paper you get the News from All parts but not from These parts, you get the news from Tregarry from Polgoose from all they Little places which are No Account, the people here feel Slighted

because they dont see There names on the paper, they come to me, they say to me—
‘Thyrza, how dont e write to that Editor a yourn and Stirr him Upp?’

“Dear mr, I ham but a Weak Woman but think I could write you the News in these parts so well as any Tregarry man, would you like for me to send the news, I ask no Sallary, Jan’s doing Tolable well with the Fishing, lobsters be Slight but Crabbs plentyfull, you might put on your paper that crabs is plentyful here, also Mullet, plenty going on here, we ad a Sale of Furnichure here last week, a man come to it Drunk, bid 15 shilling for 6 Empty Brandy bottles, you might put this on your paper for a Warning to the Drunkard, if his mind ad not been Sett on the Drink he would a been more Careful to see if the bottles was Full first.

“Dear mr, I went to the Sale, I bot a High Chair for Baby so he can sit up to Table and take his meals Propper with Ma and Da (this is private, dont put This on your paper), he look a Picsure setting up to table, he say ‘Da’ and hit Jan Affectonate with is Spoon, he take his food Hearty, Jan do give im bits of Fish, I Tremble becouse of the Bones but Jan say—

‘ Nothing like Fish for growing Boys, look upon Me,’ he say and then he Slapp is Chest—‘ All fish ’ he say, dear mr if Baby do grow up so Stout as Jan I shall be Satisfyed. ‘ What,’ you say, ‘ More baby,’ you say, ‘ I want News not babys,’ you say. Dear mr, no more room on this Sheet but nex time I will write more news and no Baby, not if I can Help, but he do run on my Mind a deal and so Jan say he do get in the Ink Pott and Spread himself on the Paper, Jan will have is Joak, no more at Present from yours truthfully

“ THYRZA THEOPHILA LELEAN.”

II

“ DEAR MR,—I haven seen your Paper to see if you put the News in, what I send you about the Crabs and the Sale, dear mr Nobody haven seen your paper this week which is Great Loss, I will tell you how, it is a Sad Tale, it is like this, When the Postman come he stick the paper in a Tin Box in the old Lime Kiln down beach, the men call this lime kiln by the name of the Town Hall, they go there First thing to read paper and get the News. Well, same day your paper come the Butcher come too from Polgoose, no Stable handy, so he put

Horse and Cart in Town Hall, I Greave to say the Horse was that Hungry he chawed up all the News, not a Scrap left when the men come down, axcep some old Advertesmens and Poletex about Govament, this was a Soar Tryall, every body looking to see if you put in what I tell you about the Sale.

“Dear mr, we ad Fine time over the sale, much Laughing, the Gentleman what sell the goods is a Smart Joker, some body bid 4 shilling for a Table, so he say—‘What, 4 shilling, thats 1 shilling a Legg, how much for the Rest of it?’—that make us laugh, he know his Besness, some times he make us laugh, sometimes Pretend to get Vext—‘Shame upon e,’ he say, ‘only 9d for this Stately little Tea Pot, lucky for you Ladys I dont see no Tregarry woman here, She woulden leave it go so Cheap, but I dont Blame you for being so Carefull with your Little Arnings, cant expect money to go Flying around here like it do up to Tregarry,’ he say, and then 3 people bid a Shilling to wonce, See his Artfullness saying That about Tregarry women so to make us Jallous and then we pay more than it’s Worth for a Crackt old Teapot.

“Dear mr, Sales be Fun but Expensive,

every body get Acxcited and bid for things they dont want, Repentance come nex day, they try to Sell them agin but no Money to be found no more than Feathers on a Toad, Empty Pockets every where, much Lamenting, such is Life, what you Buy you must Pay for, you Laugh today you Weep tomorrow. Baby laugh a Deal, dont Weep more than a Healthy baby should, Jan dont Understand this, cant Bear to hear Baby weep, think its Bound to be pins or Colleck, get in a Terrable Way, so I say to Jan—‘Leave the child be, you got no Expearance with babys,’ so he say—‘Reckon I got so much as You any how,’ but I tell Jan a Woman do know without Telling, its Wonderful what a woman do find she Know about babys when she got 1 of her Own.

“Dear mr, when Baby laugh he Scrink up is Nose like I never see no Othar baby do, it look so Pretty when he laugh, you’m Forced to laugh too. we got a Hansam Cat, she is called by the name of Louisa, I used to be brave and Fond of Louisa before Baby come, but now she do get Neglected Shamefull, she dont like it, she sit in Corner, look Moarnfull on Baby, ‘Who be you,’ she say, ‘setting in my Mrs lap where I belong to be Myself, tell

e the Truth I dont think Much of you nor I
cant think whats Come to mrs these days along
a you, and Master be just as Bad ' she say to
her self, and then she Wink Sorrofull, but here
I be to the End of the Sheet and no News to
speak of and Baby have slipt in agin which I
diden Intend, but he Do get in most Saprizing
places, under Table inside Washing Tray every
where you could Think upon, dear mr I will
Try and do Better nex time, trusting you keep
your Health yours respectably

“THYRZA THEOPHILA LELEAN.”

III

“DEAR MR,—Plenty news this time if you
could fine Room, I think you could fine room
if you Try, my Writeing be Bigger than your
Printing, please Refleck Serous upon this Fack,
4 sheets look a Lot but dont hold Much when
you write Big like I do. my First news
Imprimus is we had Land an Sea Thanks
Giving up to Chapel last Sunday, great Rejoyce-
ing many Strangers from up the Country,
chapel looking Lovely, Ivies twined all over,
great Loafs a Bread Apples Tomatas turnups
cotton wooll atsetary, much Fish hangd in
Porch, all giveing Plentyfull of there Store of

Blessing, all but 1 old man, I dont give is name for Shame, a Rich man, own 3 Boats, only bring 6 Stale Pilchars, cost about 2d, so they say to him—‘How dont you bring More, this an’t Much, how are you so Mean?’ so he say—‘Do e hold with Screptur?’ so they’m Bound to say yes they do, so he say—‘Screpture tells me the Lord loveth a Chearfull giver, if I give more Ide be apt to Grumble, couldn Help myself.’

“Dear Mr, I think its Bad to be Rich and Mean and fetch Tex out of Screptur to cover your Mean Heart with, I think he’s a Roag but he have a Bad Leg, I will say That for im, Wonce Jan had a bad leg, he was Wonderful Brave over it, the doctor went to Cutt it but first he tie Jan up to the Chair, then begin cutting away, then he stop and say—‘Time to Admenester the Brandy,’ so Jan say—‘What for the Brandy doctor?’ so doctor say—‘How, bent you going to go Off?’ so Jan say—‘No doctor, youve Tyed me up too Tight for that.’ This was Brave, but I am Glad I wasen there to see doctor cut my Husband up.

“Dear mr, I will now give some More news but first would you Mind if I tell you about Baby? I look up from writeing these few

Scribles and Baby hold out his little dinky Ands to me and call me Ma, this is the First time he call me Ma, it go Warm to my Heart to hear im, so I call Jan in from sarching for the En what stole her nest up Clift and I tell Jan Baby calld me Ma, so he say—‘What a Masterpeace that Cheeld be to be sure, lets Hear im,’ so I tell Baby to call me Ma agin for Da to hear, so Baby look Solam, then he Laugh and wave his Ands to us but wont say Ma agin, so Jan say—‘Dont Beleave e,’ and go off agin after the En, but twas True and I do think Baby want to keep it Secret betwix Im and Me.

“Alass dear mr, paper all Fulld up, no more Room for news which I will tell nex time with kind Permishon yours truthfully

“THYRZA THEOPHILA LELEAN.”

IV

“DEAR MR,—I dont see Nothing on your paper about the News I send last week, did you get my Letter? I send these letters by Post, Jan dont go Reglar to Market now so I give letters to Postman, I think he is Honest and take them to You, what a Blessing the

post be, it join Habsant Friends and only cost 1d.

“Dear mr, the Postman have is Tryalls like the rest, I will tell you one, there was a Maid in these parts, she was Plain poor thing, never have no Chap, Nobody send her no Valantine, this do Greave her Soar but she dont give up Hope. Well, come 14 Feb, the postman come along, the maid is waiting Hopefull by the gate, he hold out a Letter, her hand Tremble, she go to take it Quick, ‘Wait a bit,’ says postman, ‘the Chap was that Mazed with Love he forgot the Stamp, 2d to pay,’ says postman, so the maid Run and get the 2d, she give him the 2d, she Snatch the letter, Tear it open, find 1 of these Uggly Valantines inside, this make her that Mad she Throw it in postmans face, call him Fatt Roag, dear mr I allow tis hard to pay 2d for 1 of these Ugly Valantines, but no Acassion to call poor Innacent Postman a Fat roag.

“Dear mr, if you mist my letter it was about Thanks giving up to Chapel, they selld the Fruit and Vegebles by Auction, I greave to say much Squabbling over the sale, the things got Mixt, you bid for Grapes and got Cabbedges, the money go to these Heathen

Missianorys, all for a Good cause but you dont Like to feel you been Cheated after that.

“ Dear mr, I would write you More news but Baby have Upsot the Ink Pott, I put some Water in but no Good, that’s what makes my Writeing look so Wisht. Jan say to me— ‘Thyrza, Ime Anxious about that Cheeld, soon as he see Ink he Go for it, Hope he wont grow up to be 1 of these Poets, its in the Blood, we must be Careful.’ Only one of Jans Joaks, I dont Mind his joaks, Glad to think he’s so Chearful, but he speak the joaks so Serous, some times I dont take them up Quick anough, I think he mean them for Serous, feel Vext he should say such Things, I must larn to be Good wife and take up my husbans joaks Quicker, thats the way to make Married life Comfable.

“ Dear mr, I must now Conclude before the Ink do run Dry, hopeing your fingers dont Ake like mine do with writeing your Paper, Are you Troubled with Ink on your fingers, do your wife say — ‘Shame upon e, Mucky Fingers’ like Jan do, if so Salts of Lemmon be good thing and dont smell so Wild as Turpantine, try it from yours respectably

“ THYRZA THEOPHILA LELEAN ”

V

“DEAR MR,—I got Sad News about Louisa, she use to be good Sober cat, alwes stopt in a Nights, no Randyvoozing on House Tops, no Bad Languedge acsep to Dogs, but I fear Baby have got on her Mind, he sit on her Head, pull her Tail, she feel Neglected becouse of Baby, grow Reckless, stop out Late, go fighting, dont keep her Fur clean, Low behaviour in House, lose all Respeck for her self, this should larn us not to be Jallous, she dont care What happen to her, her heart's that Sore along a Baby, she Quarrel with cat nex door, much Sissing and Wowing and Scratching, Curous to see them stop Suddan and Rake for Fleas, then begin Fighting agin, presenly they'm so Took Up with fighting they dont see where they'm to, they Tumble over clift all Hugged up together, Jan ran down, pick them up both quite Stiff, no Life seemingly, we put Louisa in Oven, give her Brandy, a terrable Anxous time, my Heart Reproacht me for Neglecting poor Louisa and driveing her on Evil Ways, then she open 1 Eye, then Baby hapt to Holler so she Shut eye agin like she think Life not worth Troubling about with That young Feller

round, so then I take her on my Lap, stroke her Soft, speak soft to her, then she open Both eyes, so I hold her up and Whistle to her. Louisa haven got no Ear for Musick, Hate to be wistled at, so when I Whistle she lift her Paw, try to Smack my Face but no Strength left to do it, that made us Glad to see Louisa got some Roagery and Sperit left in her, I think she will do very well now.

“Dear mr, I will now Report some News for your paper, butter be Cheap, eggs is Dear, also Poltry, many Ens having lost theyr Famalys by the Pip, a Marredge here last week, the Man is 40 year old which we Consider Consedrable for a Batchelar, but he was born Cross Eye, so he could look Tender on 2 Maids to wonce, he think himself Safe becouse the Maidens cant tell which he look at, but at last he got too Bold and then he got catcht, this is a Warning not to Trust to cross eyes and other Natral Advantedges, you get Careless and then you’m Catcht, Baby got Blue Eyes like is Father, they are like little Flowers grown on his Face, much the colour of Borage flowers, borage is the Bluest flower that grow, we got some in our Garden, I use to look on them in bad weather to mind me of

the blue Skies but now I can look in Baby's Eyes, this do sound Terrable like Poetry, but tis quite True for all that, the words matcht their selfs Acседentle.

"Dear mr, I Hope you will put my news on your paper, people come to me and tell me Things and then they say—'Send That up to that Editor a yourn,' its mostly Piggs been killd or got Famalys, I think its Low to talk so Much about Pigs like they do here, but if you dont think pigs is too low for your Raspectable paper I could send you much Infamation. Jan say to me—'Thyrza, what your Editor do want is 1 or 2 Horred Murders, so you tell him I dont mind sticking a Knife in 1 of these Coast Guard 1 of these Dark nights if so be he promise to pay my Expences,' dear mr, I do Solamly Assure e this is only 1 of Jans Joaks, he woulden hurt a Fly, leave alone a Coast Guard, but he's Fond of Farcing about Goverment, Jans a Radicle by Poletex, I use to be Conservatory before Marredge but now I go with my Husbant.

"Dear mr, please think upon the Pigs and leave me know, hopeing you keep Nicely from yours truthfully

"THYRZA THEOPHILA LELEAN."

VI

"DEAR MR,—not much News this week, Bad weather, every body in doors, no Fish, no Scandal, nothing but I new Baby come to Chief Officers wife up to Coast guard, we call it the Govament Baby, Jan see it Yesday when he go up to sell Eggs to govament, he say he've seen Better babys took off a Christmas tree, he say its Frock is tyed up with Red Tape in stead of Ribbans, I think he mean this for a Joak but not sure. Our baby got Blue ribbans to match is Eyes, he's like a Sunbeam in the House, I Pitty them that haven got no Cheldern in the house this Malencoly weather.

"Dear mr, I am Truely sorry I got no News for you, Jan say—'Why not make up some Fine news with plenty Blood in it, then you can Contradick your news nex week and that will make Another Itum.' Jan do say thats the Reglar way on these papers, but dear mr, I Know you be too Honest to do such thing, I do Assure e I do Farmly Belcave every Word you put on your paper, so do Jan.

"Dear mr,—I read your paper to Jan, then he give his Apincon, then I give My apincon, then we Argyfy a bit, then I give in to Jan, he

dont like for me to Agree with him to wonce, he Love a bit of Argyment to keep his Brain Plyant, so I dont give in, not till he begin to Bang on the Table with is Fist and say— ‘Cant think how you are so Stuped, whats the Use of trying to argyfy with a Woman, Ide rather argyfy with a Dead Duck in a Mud Pool,’ then I give in Quick, then he say— ‘Glad to see you got Some sence, now pitch and read us Another itum.’

“Dear mr, I dont see no Sence in Argyfying but the Men do like it and you got to give in to them, Jan be a Fine hand to a Hargyment, he Never give in. Some times his brother Dick do step in of a Heavnen, then we get some Rare old Dialogs about Conshanse, about Where do the Tides come from, about How tis the Women haven got no Sence, about How much Beef could a Man put away at 1 Go if he Tryed, they dont never Settle nothing but it keep them Warm and dont hurt Nobody.

“Dear mr, Jan say to me—‘Thyrza, if you’m Short of News, how don’t e send your Editor a Joak, keep im in Good temper, do to full up a Corner in his paper.’ We got some Fine joaks in these parts, been going round a

Brave many Year, must be Good joaks or woulde[n] Keep so Long, I like these Old joaks Best my self, you Know their Meant for Joke, you can Take them up to wonce. I will tell you 1 of our Best joaks, Every body know this joak, every body Tell it, every body Laugh when you tell it, its about a Man going to Market to buy a Horse, his name was Jacky, so his Wife say to im—‘Dont be Penny Wise Jacky, pay $\frac{1}{2}$ a Crown Extry and get a Good one while you’m About it.’ First time I hear this joak I dont Reckonize what it is, I think its Foolishness expecting to get a Good horse for only 2s. 6d. extry, but now I Understand it is Not foolishness but a Joak, so now I can Laugh with the Rest.

“Dear mr, I hope you will put this joak on your Paper, our people would be Prowd to see their Favrite joak in Print, we got Another joak here, it makes the Men laugh, dont Care about it my self, its about a Man, he was Irish, his name was Paddy, he go to buy a Pound of Candles, it was Wet night, the candles fall in a Puddle, so when he get home he put them in Oven to dry, then the Greace begin to run so he say—‘The More they’m Dry the More they’m Wet.’ Dear mr, this joak dont make me Laugh, it

make me Vext to think the man should be so Foolish to Waste the good candles, but these Irish be a Hingarant Lot, I reckon his Wife was Out, a Woman would know better than That.

"Dear mr, this is a Long letter though no News in it, hoping Better luck nex time, yours truthfully

"THYRZA THEOPHILA LELEAN."

VII

"DEAR MR,—I Greave to say Jan wont leave me send you no more Letters after this, he dont like you not putting my News on your paper, he say you'm no Gentleman, please Excuse Jan talking so Rude, he's Prowd of his Wife, dont like to think I been Slighted, please dont think I am Affended by you not putting my news on your Well Read Paper, I got Much to consoul me, a Lovely Baby a Good husbant many Blessings, shoulde wonder but what my Poor Scribbles ben't Fitt to put on your Intellagent paper.

"Dear mr, before I say my Long farewell I wish to tell you about Louisa, you will be Releavd to hear she is Happy now, got 3 dinky Kittens, not Jallous of Baby any more

now she Understand what it is to be a Mother,
my Heart do go Out to her when I see her so
Tender with her Babys, wash them All day,
Hate to leave them out of Sight, say Wow
wow soft to them when she come Back, dear
mr I Know how she Feel.

“Dear mr, I often think upon the days
before I got Married when I was Poet and Jan
courting of me, I thought I was Happy then,
no Troubles so long as the Words matcht,
wages Reglar, plenty time for Courting and
Poetry, I use to say to myself—‘Thyrza dont
be Foolish, dont be in such Vilence to get
Married, wait a bit and Injoy your self while
you’m Young, marredge mean Trouble, no
pleasant Courting then, no time for Poetry,
why get Married?’

“Dear mr, I was Foolish maid, I know
Better now, seeming to me they that Injoy
their selfs all the While dont get no Time to be
Happy, you cant sit down fold hands and say—
‘Now I will be Happy for a bit,’ it look to me like
Happyness do come round the Corner when you
an’t Looking, when washing Dishes, darning
your Husbants Stockens stitching Frocks for
Baby, then you dont Think about Happyness
but There tis all the while, not so Axciting as

Courtship but better for you, it Spread out more, last a Life Time so long as you dont be Greedy over your Food and get the Indageston, thats what Spile the Temper, Break up Happy homes, make you speak Vishous to your kind Husban, Smack your Tender Baby.

“ Dear mr, my Appatite continue Hearty, my Dageston be Powerfull, so I hope to keep happy a Long time.

“ Dear mr, you must think you’m in Chapel with my Tejous Sarmon, will stop now, will say my Last Farewell, dear mr I am sorry to say it, I feel like you’m a Valuble old Friend, you been so Kind reading my Scribbles, I make so Bold to wish you Every Prosperaty from yours Truthfully

“ THYRZA THEOPHILA LELEAN.”

LANGARROCK GREAT TREE

OUR county guide-books stand in need of revision. Not one of them but makes mention in properly respectful terms of Langarrock Great Tree, and Langarrock Great Tree was felled last summer.

It was a beech, and it stood in the Church-yard, midway along the path from the gate to the porch. Its trunk measured fifteen feet and some odd inches round at the butt; five feet higher its girth was all but thirteen feet. Its exact height is not recorded, but when you stood on the top of its neighbour the church tower, which is seventy feet high, it eclipsed your view down the valley with a swelling hill of verdure. Its great arms covered a circle twenty yards in diameter, on one side brushing the west window of the church, and drooping over the lych-gate on the other. Its age was unknown, unless you are inclined to credit the local tradition that it was planted at the time when the foundations

of the church were laid, which would make it more than five hundred years old. At any rate, two centuries ago it was already known as the Great Tree. Yet to the last it showed no signs of senile decay, but remained sound at heart and in every limb. At some early period of its history it had been pollarded, and after centuries of free growth it still seemed to remember the sharp lesson of the knife. The human touch persisted, in a slight thickening of the upper part of the trunk, an odd disposition of the main branches, and a more than vegetable something that invested its whole appearance—something that was at once grotesque and lovely. You felt that, if only you watched long enough, the Dryad would take courage and peep.

In spite of its age and bulk, it gave no impression of patriarchal gravity. To the last it carried itself with a lively air and grace, singular in so ancient a tree, and hardly in keeping, perhaps, with its situation and surroundings. Its boughs, and its trunk from six feet upwards, were delicately rounded, and glistened like satin among the gold-green of its foliage; below, it was closely covered with inscriptions, some deeply cut, some lightly

scratched, and some almost obliterated by the finger of time. They were mostly of one kind—four initials, two above two, set in a heart-shaped cartouche; and they gave the tree a claim to rank among our parish archives, as a betrothal-register of generations of lovers. Never was tree so steeped in amorous associations. On Sundays, as the congregation left the church, it was the custom of the young men and maidens to detach themselves from their elders and gather under its shade in a merry crowd, that slowly sorted itself out by two and two until only a single couple lingered. It was the favourite spot for assignations; if your way took you past it after dark, you were pretty sure to hear soft whispers, or catch a glimpse of shadowy figures starting asunder. And in the local code of courtship this rule was found, that no walking out, keeping of company, “arming along,” or other preliminaries of wooing were to be regarded as binding on man or maid, until the lover, standing beneath the tree in the presence of his beloved, had taken forth his knife, sought out a smooth space on the trunk, and carved the record of his vows in the living bark. Whether those vows were kept or broken, or

how far the inscription was subsequently confirmed or contradicted by certain other records in the church hard by, was no concern of the tree's. There it stood, an amicable Pagan set in consecrated ground, scarred like a heathen god by the knives of its worshippers, breathing frank incitements to love and laughter at the very doors of the church. You can hardly wonder that the ecclesiastical authorities regarded it with sour disapproval, or that three times at least they attempted, under various pretexts, to compass its destruction. Twice they failed; the third time they were only too successful.

Their first recorded attack was in 1703. In our parish accounts for that year, the year of the greatest storm Britain has ever known, the following entries occur:—

- “Pd y^e Glaisher aboute y^e Glass in y^e
Church Window wch was broke by y^e
Great Tree in y^e Storme £00. 07s. 10d.
“Pd Jos: Jolley ffor lopping y^e Great
Tree in y^e Church Hay £00. 01s. 02d.
“Recd from Samwell Bargwanath ffor
Tember took from y^e sayd Tree . . . £00. 14s. 06d.

On the blank page opposite, the scribe has made a note—

“This day att y^e Vestrey much descoorse

wther the Great Tree should come down ffor y^e Damege itt hath done and is like to doe unto y^e Church, where att Passon Dawe sayd hee would haue itt down Roote and Braunche and was upholden by y^e Church Wardens ouer seers Way wardens and mee Solomon Cayzer pishe Cleark, where att Squire Behenna comming in upon us sayd hee woud have it Rest and soe it Resteth."

This was the same Squire Behenna who, twelve years later, on the first Sunday in October 1715, standing under this very tree before morning service, proclaimed James III king of these realms, and threatened to put Parson Dawe in the stocks with his own hands if he offered to read the prayers for the Hanoverian usurper and his brood of ratlings. He also lives honourably in history as one of the first of West Country landowners to be inspired with that noble passion for tree-planting which came over our ancestors in a green flood at the beginning of the eighteenth century. It was he who peopled our valley with those stately battalions of oak and ash, sycamore and Cornish elm, which flourish to this day, and are gazed at every summer by hundreds of admiring tourists. Such a man was not

likely to sit quietly at home when danger threatened the first tree in the Duchy. You can picture him, the fiery old Jacobite, booted and spurred, flushed with claret and indignation, bursting in upon the village Sanhedrim as they sat placidly plotting the murder of that royal helpless creature. You can imagine the conclave—parson, churchwardens, overseers, waywardens, and Solomon Cayzer, parish clerk—cowering bewildered under the lash of his wrath, and blankly wondering why all this fuss should be raised over a bit of timber.

All through the sleepy Georgian days no harm seems to have been offered to the tree, except once by a mad Methodist, who rushed one day into the churchyard, prophesying of groves and Asherah, and hacked at the trunk with a bill-hook until the constable was fetched to haul him off. The second real peril did not threaten until about fifty years ago. At that time our west window was blocked by a gallery, erected and set apart for the use of the church musicians—flute, clarinet, bass-viol, and a choir of men and urchins. It was they who now conspired against the tree. The lopped branches had grown again; and in summer, when the leaves were out, the gallery

was so darkened that the occupants could not see to read their psalm-books, or distinguish *Devizes* from *Old Ninetieth* in broad daylight. So they took counsel and laid their grievance before the authorities, declaring, these arrogant artists, that either the tree must go or they would go themselves. Again the parson and vestry joined the cabal against the tree, and again the Squire Behenna of that day stepped in to protect it. While he lived, said the Squire, not a twig of its head should be severed ; it was dear to him on his ancestor's account, and for its own venerable sake beside. But as for flute and viol, they were hopelessly out of date, and he had long been awaiting a convenient opportunity to do away with their tootling and scraping for good and all. So the plot recoiled on its concoctors' heads. The amazed musicians were taken at their word and dismissed, the gallery was pulled down, a harmonium was installed in the chancel, and for half a century more the tree was left in peace.

I should not like to say that it presumed on its immunity, thus twice tested, or that it bore any real malice against the Church for her persecutions, but certainly in these latter days it seemed at times to be animated by a sportive

spirit of mischief towards its neighbour. During long sermons on drowsy summer days it would tap and rustle at the window, beckoning you out of doors, tempting your thoughts to wander in green shades. In winter it had its riotous moods, when, in the midst of a hymn, it would suddenly raise an uproarious bluster, shouting and thumping outside, as they say the giants of these parts used to do in the old days, when they came upon the cell of a saint and heard the voice of the holy man within, up-raised in a psalm. In spring a jesting thrush took it for his pulpit, and preached a rival sermon, full of quips and cranks of the most unseemly kind. In autumn, matters were worse; it was then the starlings' favourite meeting-house, where they collected to whistle irreverent cat-calls all through morning service. When they were particularly noisy, good Parson Tregenna would sometimes break the thread of his discourse, and try to weave in something about the natural piety of the feathered creation; but it would not do. There is no disguising the fact that the starling is the most carnal-minded of birds; try as you may, you can never spiritualise his ear-splitting squeals and profane ventriloquising into sound doctrine.

Parson Tregenna, that good easy soul, who was incapable of bearing ill-will against man or bird or tree, died a year ago. A new rector came down among us—a young man, eager and zealous, brandishing the newest of new brooms, and proclaiming war against all the cobwebs that had gathered in and about our heads during the past thirty years. Not many days after his arrival he was observed prowling about the churchyard, numbering the headstones, peering up into the branches of the Great Tree, insolently embracing its trunk with his outstretched arms, and making numerous calculations with measuring-tape and notebook—to what purpose, nobody had an inkling until the day of the Easter Vestry. Then, after this and that business had been settled, up got the new parson, called the attention of the meeting to the disgracefully overcrowded condition of the graveyard, and offered us the choice of two alternatives—either to raise fifty pounds and purchase an extension, or to cut down and uproot the Tree. The latter course, he calculated, would make some fifteen hundred square feet of burying space immediately available at a small cost—nay, if the timber sold well, at a considerable profit; and it was the course he

strongly recommended. Then, with a hypocritical expression of regret that his duty towards the parish should compel him to advocate the removal of "this ancient and notable specimen of Nature's handiwork," the new parson sat down.

Farmer Hawke, people's churchwarden, rose to support the recommendation, laying special emphasis on the fact that, in these shy times, fifty pound was fifty pound. As for the tree, for his part he could see no sense or utility in the great wooden thing. Trees were all very well on an upland farm like his own, where he would be glad enough of a few of the same to shelter his house and barns; but here, in an enclosed valley, they were about as useful and judicious as open umbrellas in a back-parlour. He was aware that the sight-seeing strangers who infested our village were in the habit of going into ecstasies of maudlin admiration over the tree on account of its age and bigness; but where, he asked, was the credit in that? What else had the idle thing to do *but* to grow old and big? It sickened his heart to see those foolish foreigners stand gaping round it, when they would pass by a meadow full of prize-bred fat bullocks without turning a head. Down with the cumbrous eyesore, said Farmer Hawke.

Benjamin Crapp, sexton and bell-ringer, followed on the same side, speaking with a heat and bitterness born of a personal grievance against the tree. Every autumn, said Benjamin, he was put to the tedious and unnecessary trouble of sweeping, pitchforking, and wheeling away a monstrous great litter of leaves, the tree's discarded apparel, to the extent of two cartloads at least. And whose fault was it that about the same time of year the one aim and aspiration of every pig in the parish was to get into the churchyard, and rout and nuzzle among the graves for scattered mast? A dozen times an hour he was called upon to cast down his tools and chase some intrusive porker from the sacred precincts, and as soon as one was driven out, another popped in. There was no unholier beast to be found than your pig, as he would undertake to prove any day out of Leviticus. Their presence in consecrated ground was little short of sacrilege, and the fault was entirely the tree's for enticing them in. Down with the gashly, untidy, godless old lump of timber, said Benjamin Crapp.

These three having said their say, and nobody rising to plead for the tree, a vote was taken, and the voice of the meeting was found to be unanimous for destruction.

Now all the talk of the village was of the tree. I only wish I could report a tale of the growing indignation of the inhabitants, culminating, perhaps, in a mass meeting of all lovers, past and present, gathered to protest against the sacrifice of their tutelary spirit, the guardian of their vows, whose every leaf was hallowed by tender memories of sighs and kisses. But no: not a voice was raised in its behalf; all sentimental considerations, if such existed, were nipped by Farmer Hawke's weighty argument. These were indeed shy times, and fifty pounds were indubitably fifty pounds. Let the Church execute her sentence of axe and faggot as soon as she pleased.

One hope remained—the Squire; and at first the Squire, true to the traditions of his house, rose nobly to the occasion. Down from the Big House came his prompt veto. At all costs the life of his venerable dependent was to be spared. If fifty pounds would save it, the sum should be forthcoming out of his own pocket. Now you would have thought the tree was safe. But the new parson had to be reckoned with; and in the new parson all the traditional animosity of the Church against the tree seemed to be concentrated and intensified. Finding

that the Squire was not to be moved by argument, he took counsel with Benjamin Crapp, whose bosom burned with an equal flame of resentment. Benjamin scratched his head till the friction kindled a sparkle in his eye. He hunted out a rusty key, and with this and a dark lantern the two conspirators entered the churchyard at dead of night.

Next morning, the Rector hurried up to the Big House, and poured into the Squire's ear a horrid tale of vegetable perfidy: how, being put on the scent by Sexton Crapp, he had descended into the family vault of the Behennas, and there had found a tangled mass of the roots of the ungrateful tree, which had feloniously crept through a chink in the masonry, and were playing havoc with the Squire's ancestral bones. With bated breath he described how they had already displaced and wrenched open several of the coffins, and were now in the act of ghoulishly battenning on the rich dust of ten generations of county gentlemen, beginning—O rankest ingratitude!—with the tree's first protector, the Jacobite.

At this the Squire's heart was turned and hardened against the tree, and with an explosion of strong words he abandoned it to its doom.

Perhaps you will not blame him ; yet for my part I cannot help thinking that a little reflection and a touch of imagination might have led him to see the event in a different and more agreeable light. What more appropriate fate could be conceived for his worthy ancestor, whose soul was in trees, than that the chief of his favourites should thus seek him out, slowly groping for two centuries in the darkness underground, till it found him, netted his dreamless head with its fibres, and began transmuting his dead clay into the living green his eyes once so delighted in. Such a fate Sir Thomas Browne might have curiously moralised upon, finding it no fallacy in duration thus to subsist in leaves instead of bones, and to be arboreally, not pyramidally extant. But the Squire, honest man, recked not of these things, seeing only what he deemed the insolent ingratitude of a pampered dependent.

Still the end was delayed, and that from the lowest of motives. It was now April, and the sap was rising. In order to get their sorry profit of blood-money out of the tree, the murderers must wait until the excitement of spring died down in its veins. So for three months it was allowed to enjoy the rain and

sunshine ; and this was the most painful part of the whole unpleasant business, to watch the soft new leaves unfolding, as fresh and delicate as a sapling's, to mark its growing confidence and serenity as the days went on, and to know all the time that the hour of its fullest vigour and completest enjoyment was to be the hour of its fall. In common decency they should have waited until its winter trance was on ; then the crude barbarity of the deed would not have been so apparent.

Going down into the village one July morning, I found a crowd of people gathered in the road below the church, and knew that the hour was come. The tree was still standing in all its summer bravery, but the sacrificial ropes were about it, and at the end of each rope a knot of men stood ready. I could see the great white gash in its trunk ; and close by, red-faced, triumphant, axe in hand, was the Rector himself, so lost to all sense of shame that he had elected to be the executioner of his own vindictive sentence. Even as I looked, he gave a word of command ; the men at the ropes spat on their hands and took hold ; and suddenly that vast mountain of leaves trembled violently from head to foot. Having no mind to see the

rest, I hurried away ; but I could not get out of earshot before there came a sound like a gusty sigh, that swelled from a whisper to a roar, and ended in a mighty crash. I looked back. The church tower stood alone ; where its noble companion had been was now a chasm of empty air.

So fell Langarrock Great Tree, a martyr, as I will always maintain, to religious intolerance. The Rector, to be sure, laughs when I tell him so ; and I will do him the justice to say that he seems quite unconscious of the inheritance of obscure rancour which was the real motive that urged him to the deed. The Church funds gained a pound or so by the sale of the timber ; on the other hand we lost what the whole rateable value of the parish could not replace. " Ah, Don Pepino ! " exclaims Landor, " old trees in their living state are the only things that money cannot command. Rivers leave their beds, run into cities, and traverse mountains for it ; obelisks and arches, palaces and temples, amphitheatres and pyramids, rise up like exhalations at its bidding ; even the free spirit of Man, the only thing great on earth, crouches and cowers in its presence. It passes away and vanishes before venerable trees."

WISHT WOOD

DEVON folk are wont to declare that there is not wood enough in Cornwall to make a coffin with. There is as much truth in this as in most of the tales folk tell of their dear neighbours. Certainly the Duchy is no longer what it was in the old days—the old ancient times of all, when the oaks rubbed branches together from Moorwinstow to Sennen, and the last wolf was not yet trapped in the forest of Ludgvan. But Cornwall is still able to provide funereal timber for every one of her tall sons—ay, and for all the stunted Devonians that ever died of a surfeit of sour cider and sourer cream. Her hills are bare ; naked and unflinching they stand up against all the winds of heaven ; but down in the valleys and seaside glens, where the wind never ventures, grow elms as tall and oaks as stout as ever Devon man set eyes on. And I know of a place where a wood is—no upstart plantation or straggling copse, but a real wild

wood of ancient growth, dense enough to shut the world out, big enough, with the help of a little manœuvring and make-believe, for a man to lose himself in; without its like in all Cornwall. They say there is a wood near Bodmin, but this is not the one. Where it is I shall not tell, lest the Devon men should come and make game of it, and the foreign visitors drive out in their carriages to stare at it as they stare at the Mên-an-tol and other Cornish wonders. That would be a pity, for the charms of Wisht Wood (so I will call it, leaving its real name unspoken) are secret and delicate, and only to be comprehended and enjoyed by the solitary lover.

This much may be told, that it lies in a hollow on a hillside, where the land dips from the moor to the pasture, and you may approach it from either direction according to your mood—down from the heather to surprise it, or up from the grass to woo it gently. Coming from below you see it afar off, and lose it and find it again as the path wanders among the hills; and when you reach it, there is only a little brook to cross, and you are within. But if you come from above, you are suddenly aware of the moist sweet breath of innumerable green leaves, close at hand, and not one to be seen.

You step without warning from heather on to stone ; you halt, for your next step would be not on earth or rock, but on the top of a tall tree. A wall of granite drops sheer beneath you into a green twilight. Pines and ash trees crowd against it, young elders and thorns grow out of its crevices, and beyond, down the slope, stretches the wood—a ruddy mist of elm-buds in the spring, in summer a leaning roof of green leafage, a dense, unbroken surface on which the eye rests as on firm ground, denying the airy space below, so that it comes like the shock of a blunt contradiction when a wood-pigeon suddenly claps its way out.

Within, the wood's name is justified ; 'tis a wisht place sure enough, as people say. It wears an appearance of extreme old age—age that has passed the limits of venerable dignity and fallen into a fantastic dotage. Grey rocks lie prone in grotesque attitudes among the trees ; the trees too are grey with moss and shaggy lichen, and scarcely one of them has its natural growth. There are pollard ashes leaning cunningly this way and that, their monstrous heads bristling with stiff twigs. There are elder trees whose trunks run along the ground and suddenly erect themselves, like threatening

snakes. There are thorn-bushes on which you would think some tormenting spell had been cast, their twigs are involved in such mad contortions. In one remote corner you come upon two young trees—an elm and a sycamore—locked together in a desperate death-grapple. Two others, straight-stemmed firs, are crossed like swords in a duel. Another has been pinned down by a boulder and is growing over it, slowly smothering it in thick foliage. The heart of the wood is a deep black pool, hardly to be approached, so thick is the crowd of trees and bushes that stoop and peer about it. You guess them to be gloating over some unsavoury secret which they would not have you share. Elsewhere there is a handsome flourishing oak with one unaccountable dead limb, from which, as you approach, a stealthy hawk stoops and flies noiselessly away. On still spring afternoons the least stir of wind rouses a sound of light footsteps and a faint, sweet perfume; but when you turn your head, no fair ghost glides past; it is only a laurel thicket tapping dry leaf on leaf, and uneasily shaking its tasselled blossoms.

You cannot doubt that other influences are at work in the place beside the ordinary control of sun and wind and rain. Trees are not the dull

rustics some would have us think them. A wood is as impressionable, as sensitive to good and evil influence, as any other crowd. No visible reason prevents the trees of Wisht Wood from leading a decent, orderly life. What, then, has driven them thus frantic?

A friend advances a plausible theory. In the rock-wall at the top of the wood there is a cave, blocked at the entrance by a great stone. This, he declares, is no other than the stone told of in the history of King Arthur, under which Merlin lies imprisoned by the craft of Nimue, the Lady of the Lake. Our friend supports his contention with much earnestness and some display of learning. He scouts the claim of the Welsh folk to the bones of the great enchanter. The story nowhere tells of his death, and so the Mynydd Merlin, the hill by Towey under which it is alleged that he lies buried, must be a delusive cenotaph. The Welsh were always vain and superstitious, ready to believe any wild tale that might serve to enhance their glory; and they had their bards, skilful in fashioning false stories and imposing them on the world; so they have stolen the credit from Cornwall, and made a Welsh king of Arthur and a stuttering Taffy of Merlin. It

was at Camelot that Merlin met Nimue and fell into a dotage on her, and Camelot is undoubtedly the Cornish Camelford. From Camelot they went together to Benwick, and afterwards—the history is precise here—returned to Cornwall, where she grew weary of his importunities and lured him to his doom under the stone. The learned arguments adduced in proof of the identity of that stone with the stone in Wisht Wood may be omitted here. But granting that this is the place, Merlin must still be here, and alive; for the Lady would never have released one whom she feared and hated as a devil's son, and neither she nor any one else had skill to encompass his death. You can no longer hear him "making great moan," as Sir Bagdemagus did when he came this way, but his evil heart still beats strongly, and he continues to weave his spells, not in the hope of freeing himself, but out of pure malignity, finding comfort in the thought that he may yet have power to do harm in the world. The subtle venom of his magic rises like a vapour through the crevices of the rock, poisoning the air, driving the trees to play mad antics, and twisting their innocent growth into a deformed likeness of his ugly passions.

So far our friend ; but though his explanation is attractive and plausible, to my mind it lacks a sound historical basis. My objection is that it finds no support in local tradition, though it is just the kind of tale of which tradition would be sure to preserve a vivid memory. To proceed scientifically on our investigation, since documents are wanting, it is precisely to local tradition that we must apply, and to the simple but sufficient solution it offers I pin my faith. In four words, Wisht Wood is pisky-ridden.

Now by adopting this explanation we get rid of the shadowy Merlin, in whom I for one have never entirely believed, and we are enabled to put a pleasanter construction on the behaviour of the trees. Instead of writhing in atrocious torment under an infliction of black magic, they are simply attempting in their solid, clumsy way to adapt themselves to the freakish moods of the Little People ; and all this melodramatic show of anguish and deadly combat is merely a joke and a maygame—a rheumatically, stiff-jointed old grandfer playing at Indians and pirates with young Curly-locks. The sport may not be altogether to the old one's liking, but the capricious elf is master, and must be obeyed.

One thing is certain : no spot, even in Cornwall, is so pisky-haunted as the neighbourhood of Wisht Wood. Within living memory there dwelt in a cottage hard by, an old woman whose household "churrs" were all done by the little people. Every night she opened the kitchen window a little way and set a dish of milk on the table. Every morning the milk was gone, the cloam washed and put by, the grate polished, and the floor swept and sprinkled with white sand. And there is a man working at the farm below, who is in the habit of going up to Churchtown every Saturday for a social glass, or maybe two, at the inn. And three times out of four, he assures me, he is pisky-led on his way home across the downs. As soon as his feet touch the heather they fall under an enchantment, and lead him in stumbling circles and zigzags till his dizzy senses fail him, and he knows no more till he wakes next morning with his toes in a puddle and his head in a furze-bush. As for the wood itself, few of the neighbours will venture within it by day, and none by night. Chattering voices are heard there, for all the world like the confidential twitterings of a flock of pednypaleys, or titmice, and the scurry of tiny feet, like the

sound of mice hiding and seeking in the grass; and on Mondays, if you peep in as you go by, you may chance to see scores of little red caps like aglets, hanging up on the thorn-bushes to dry. From these, and other indications, I am inclined to believe that Wisht Wood is the headquarters or metropolis of piskydom. And so I come to my story.

But first a note on the origin and history of the piskies. Their origin indeed is doubtful. Some think their tiny bodies hold the souls of the good heathen who died before the saints came to Cornwall, and are fated to remain on earth because there is no appropriate place for them elsewhere. No such thing, say others: there were no piskies at all in Cornwall before the invasion of the saints; but when St. Keverne and St. Just and the rest sailed across the Irish Sea on their goodly millstones (being so saintly that they could not do the simplest thing except in a miraculous way), the piskies came with them, perched on their shoulders or nestling in the tangle of their beards; for in those days holiness wore a merry face, and the saints were well disposed towards the sprightly little folk, and loved to have them about them to cheer their vigils with sport and frolic.

Others again declare the piskies to be the ancient pagan gods of Cornwall; and this to me is the most probable theory. Being gods, they subsist on worship and belief; without these they perish. Tiny as they are now, in the old days they were tall and stout, far exceeding mankind in stature. You have heard of the Cornish giants; well, these were they. But on the day when the first millstone with its saintly cargo kissed the pebbles under Cape Cornwall, they began to shrink and shrivel. As the years passed and the old beliefs faded, they dwindled, until at the time of my story, the time when the great Preacher came across the Tamar, they were no bigger than children's dolls.

That was before the folk of West Cornwall were so foolish as to make roads, which only serve to let in tourists and other undesirable persons. But the Preacher, though small in stature and precise in his attire, had the stoutest heart that ever beat under a black gown. By bridle-paths, trodden knee-deep into mire under the hoofs of pack-mules, by trackless moors, over rocks and through rivers, he pushed his indomitable way from mining village to upland farm, from upland farm to fishing cove,

halting, wherever he found an audience, to plead, exhort, and denounce. In time he came to the neighbourhood of Wisht Wood, and entered the farmhouse that still stands hard by, first to deliver his message and afterwards to take rest and nourishment. And as he sat in the kitchen expounding points of doctrine to the farmer and his hinds, a tapping was heard at the door, low down, like the sound of a grey-bird breaking a snail-shell on a stone. The farmer's wife, going to open the door, screamed and started back ; for there on the threshold stood a tiny man, no bigger than a whitneck, or stoat, when it sits up on its hind-paws. Like a whitneck he was dressed in a brown coat and white waistcoat ; his breeches were brown also, his stockings green, and he had silver buckles to his shoes. On his head he wore a red cap, which he doffed politely as the door opened, disclosing a natty little wig made of grey lichen. In his right hand he flourished a plume of white cotton-grass, by way of flag of truce.

"Aw, my life !" screamed the farmer's wife. "Aw, my dear life, ef 'tedn' wan o' they piskies !"

Now the Preacher was not without acquaintance with the creatures of the unseen world. All his life the evil and good spirits

hovered about him, comforting or buffeting. So he showed no astonishment or dismay at the sight of the little man. He stood up, and in a stern voice, the voice that had made wax of the hearts of thousands, he bade the spirit depart and trouble him not. But the little fellow did not budge. Pressing the red cap to his bosom, he bowed profoundly, and in a voice like the chippering of mice behind the wainscot he squeaked out a string of outlandish words.

"What is all this?" asked the Preacher, looking round.

The farmer's grandfather, a very old man, answered from his seat in the chimney-corner.

"I d' knaw," he quavered. "'T'es a bra' long time sence I heerd the like; but I d' knaw. 'T'es the auld ancient spache of Cornwall. They talked so when I was a boy, but now 'tes most forgot. Manen o' what the li'll chap do say is, the piskies of Wisht Wood are wanting to 'ave a word weth your reverence, ef you'll kindly step across for a minute."

"Don't 'e go, your reverence!" cried the farmer's wife. "They'm so artful and vicious as foxes. They'll do 'e some harm, sure 'nough, the rogues!"

The Preacher's eyes flashed.

"I will go," he said. "This is part of my work, and from my work none shall turn me back."

So saying, he went out and took the path over the meadow, the pisky trotting before him, the farm-folk following after. They crossed the little river, and passed one by one into the wood.

At first to their sun-dazzled eyes the green twilight seemed studded with innumerable clusters of scarlet berries, on the trees, on the bushes, on the rocks, everywhere. When they saw more clearly, they perceived that what they had taken for berries were little red caps, such as the pisky-ambassador wore; and under each cap was a pair of eyes no bigger than a bush-sparrow's, and as bright and unwinking; and the little eyes were set in little wrinkled faces, as like to one another as the faces of a parcel of Chinamen. All the little faces were turned towards the Preacher, and all the little eyes were taking stock of him, up and down, while the air was filled with a buzzing murmur, like the hum of midsummer flies.

The Preacher advanced a step and waited; his companions huddled in a whispering, gravely-nodding group behind him. The hum grew louder, and all the bright little eyes were turned on a square white stone that lay on the

grass, ringed about with a circle of toadstools. Suddenly a tall stout pisky, elegantly dressed, and wearing a carcanet of dewdrops about his cap, leapt briskly upon the stone, and immediately the hum died away into silence. Then the tall pisky removed his cap, hemmed, and began to speak with quaint earnest gestures of finger on palm and arms swung abroad—the queer little manikin! But as he too spoke in the ancient tongue, the Preacher turned and beckoned the old grandf’er forward to interpret. And this is what the tall pisky said to the Preacher.

“To the Sawznek Du—the black-robed Englishman—in the name of the Pobyl Vean, the Little People here assembled, greeting. We have a story to tell, a complaint to make, and a petition to prefer. In the beginning we ruled; our power was great, our stature also. Then the white monks from Eire descended on our shores like a flock of seagulls, and hunted us out and sprinkled us with holy water, so that we shrank and became as dwarfs, all but a few who avoided the shower and fled to the Hoar Rock in the Sea, and made war thence on monks and people, and perished at last by the sword. But we survived, by virtue of the holy water and of the relics of ancient worship

that remained to us. For the white monks were kindly and compassionate; they remembered we were gods, with the pride and need of gods. Our power they took from us, but left us a nook in the hearts of men, that we might not altogether perish. It was a compact between us and them, and so long as their creed endured we had no fear. Then we heard rumours of changes, of a new creed, and of a new God that hated holy water, and we trembled and hid ourselves. When we ventured forth again, our friends the monks and friars had disappeared, and black-gowned parsons were in their places. And looking upon one another, we perceived no change; our stature was not diminished by the breadth of a hair. So we took heart, and went by night and peered in the breasts of people as they lay asleep; and our niche, the niche the monks had left us, was still there, swept and garnished as of old. There was peace in our niche, but elsewhere in every heart was a division and a conflict between the new faith and the old. Then we laughed; for looking again, we perceived that we had waxed a little bigger; our limbs were plumper and our chests broader. This we set down to the dissensions between

the gods who had supplanted us; the people, not knowing which to adhere to, were turning half in jest to us, their forgotten divinities. Some of us said, 'We have but to wait; soon the parsons will go where the monks have gone, and we shall be masters again.' But others said, 'No; our time has gone by for ever; if the parsons go, others will step into their place before us. Let us rest content in our little niche; parson or priest, none will disturb us there.' And we took notice that the parsons talked loud for awhile, and then they fell asleep talking; and for many years we lived in peace and merriment undisturbed.

"But one day not long ago we awoke and looked upon one another, and exclaimed; for it seemed to each of us that his companions had suddenly grown old in the night, so wizened were their faces, so shrunken their limbs. Also it appeared as if the grass about us had miraculously sprouted; it had been breast-high when we lay down, and now it waved above our heads. And as we stared and shouted in our amazement, a jack-rabbit hopped in among us, and we jumped up and fled in terror; for he seemed as big as a bull-calf. Then we knew that what had happened at the first coming of

the monks had befallen us again. In a single night we had been shorn of half our stature. We sent forth messengers ; they returned, and told us of a strange Preacher from the East with yet another creed, hot and strong ; they spoke of shoutings and raptures, of old customs overturned, of old beliefs brushed away by the power of a single voice. Then we called a council of the chiefs, and debated on the danger that threatened. Some were for instant flight across the sea to Eire, the green island where our brethren dwell securely. Others were for a call to arms and open war ; others for way-laying the Preacher on the moors, where he might be decoyed among the deserted mine-shafts and left to break his neck at leisure. But others—and they were our wisest—counselled prudence. ‘ Let us wait,’ they said, ‘ till the Preacher comes our way. Then let us demand audience of him, and put our case before him plainly, without craft or concealment. If there be pity in him, if there be room in his creed for loving-kindness and tenderness towards the weak and oppressed, surely he will deal gently with us and renew the compact the monks made with us of old.’

“ So said our wisest, and their counsel

seemed good to us. We waited, and now the Preacher is before us, our fate in his hands. Consider, O Preacher: we are a small folk, and a harmless; there is no malice left in us, and our pride is subdued. The people love us, for the sake of old times; but now that they begin to think new thoughts, to travel this way and that, and to read in the magic Book you bring them, they are in danger of forgetting us; and forgotten, we perish. Tell us, is there no room for us in your message? Will you not slip in a word here and there, commending the Pobyl Vean, who were gods once? Gods once, and now we run from a jack-rabbit! Soon the very bull-horns, the peaceful sluggish snail-folk, will rise up against us, and the muryans, the creeping ant-folk, will send out hunting-parties to chase us from wood and moor, and the quilkens, the croaking frog-folk, will run at us open-mouthed when we go down to the stream to drink, till we shall have no place left to lay our heads in safety. We shall be homeless outcasts in our own country; no fate is harder. Have pity then, O Preacher. Your power is great: a word from you, and our safety is assured. We ask but little; no increase or exaltation, only a secure tenure of

our present stature, that we may not shrink to dust and be blown away by the wind into the sea."

Such was the speech made by the tall pisky to the Preacher in Wisht Wood, the old grandfer interpreting. The other piskies hummed applause, for their spokesman had performed his office well. They turned confident faces on the Preacher. Surely here was piteous eloquence to move the hardest heart. But the Preacher's face was stern and forbidding as he stood meditating his answer. And when it came, it was no answer. The petition he thrust aside, making no reference to it; and instead, waving a hand that seemed to brandish a sword, he delivered once again the message he had come to publish through the land. As St. Patrick preached of old to the birds, so now the Preacher preached to the piskies of Wisht Wood, in words of fire with a voice of thunder.

The piskies listened with puzzled faces, that grew longer and longer as he went on, pleading, promising, and threatening. When he had finished, the tall pisky bowed politely, and spreading two vague little hands, said—

"We are foolish little fellows; these matters are too deep for us; nor do they seem to concern us. They are for good and wicked

folk, and we are neither ; whether we laugh or cry, or do this or that, it is out of pure wantonness, and for no reason at all. How then should all this concern us? Only one thing concerns us—our diminishing stature and the danger we foresee from the bull-horns and muryans. From the fear of this arose our question, which remains unanswered. Was it obscurely put? I will repeat it. Tell us, O Preacher, is there no room for us in your new creed?—no tiny corner-space for laughter, and the telling of gay randigals, and the kicking of heels on the turf?”

Now hitherto the Preacher had been puzzled by the piskies, and doubtful in what light to view them and how to treat them. But when the tall pisky spoke thus of randigals and riotous doings, he cast all doubt aside, clearly recognising their corrupt and devilish nature. There never was a better or more saintly man than the Preacher, but there was something terrible in his inflexible goodness. Two things oppressed him—the wickedness of the world, and the awful brevity of human life ; between these he found no time or place for laughter. Angrily he turned his back on the little tempter, and addressed his followers, vehemently de-

nouncing the piskies as evil spirits, imps of the pit; passionately exhorting them to cast the demons forth from their hearts, trample them under foot, bray them with the pestle of faith in the mortar of righteousness. His words burned the people like hot coals, so that they fell under conviction and groaned aloud. Then he was seized with the spirit of prophecy, and foretold the imminent doom of all piskies, spriggans, knockers, and brownies, how they should first be scorned and then forgotten, and so perish from the land.

Then the piskies called anxiously to the old grandfer, to know what the Preacher was saying; and when he told them they wailed shrilly, and those in the trees dropped to the ground as the berries drop from the mountain ash in an autumn gale; and all the company of little men fled shrieking and lamenting into the recesses of the wood, and were seen no more.

So runs the story of the piskies of Wisht Wood and the doom pronounced on them by the Preacher who came out of England. This was many years ago, and the doom is long in fulfilling itself. The piskies are still abroad in the land, though they are shy of showing themselves, because of the fright the Preacher gave

them. For my part, it is not on account of the Preacher's denunciation that I fear for the piskies ; it is not in earnest open combat that old beliefs are overcome. But of late a more terrible enemy has come out against them. The scoffer is abroad, and all the heavy artillery of text and homily cannot work half the havoc of a single volley of light laughter. Nowadays the boys and maidens come home from school "cutting up," as they say—talking proud book-English, and making fun of giants and piskies, tokens and spells. The old speech and the old wisdom are not good enough for them. And what is the result? The stature of the piskies diminishes daily ; already the bull-horns grow restive, tossing the little men from their backs when they essay to mount them ; and the muryans, I am told, are plotting raids and robberies in their caverns underground. The time is not far distant when the last believer in the piskies will be laid in his box ; and if you are present at the burying, perhaps you will see a light cloud of imperceptible dust fly up and disperse as the grave-digger gives the final pat with his shovel on the mound. And when the dust has vanished, you will have seen the last of the piskies.

ST. LIDGY AND THE GIANT

IT is a poor sort of boast, to be sure, but such as it is, Cornish folk are entitled to make it : that they alone of all the nations have irretrievably mislaid their mother-speech. A fragment here and a fragment there, a half-forgotten phrase or two, some stray words, are all that remain alive of the softest and most melodious of Celtic tongues. The loss is irreparable. The people who forget their language forget how much beside ! Look abroad, to Wales, where the old speech still flourishes ; keeping it, they have kept their inheritance intact of glorious tradition, of conquest and adventure and sweet song ; the names of the ancient heroes and bards are in every mouth. There were heroes in Cornwall too ; and as for bards, are not the people famous to this day for their sweet voices and skill in music ? But all are forgotten ; when Cornishmen, ever too eager to catch at new things, began to roll the crabbed English speech on their tongues, their heritage

of famous story began to slip away from them. The old tales were fashioned to the old words ; they could not be translated. In the ungenial foreign soil they withered and grew awry, until now nothing remains of them but a few foolish randigals, that one is ashamed to tell the stranger for fear of being laughed at. The ancient folk and their times are shrouded in a dense mist of oblivion, which in your wakeful hours you try in vain to penetrate. Only when you lie half asleep on the cliffs by the summer sea, with no company but birds and waves, the veil may lift a little. If you keep still, and listen not too intently, you may chance to overhear such a tale as I once overheard, lying under Pednmanack between St. Lidgy's Well and the sea, with the rock-pipits and wagtails darting and calling about me, and the dunlins on the beach playing their pretty game of touch with the tide.

In those days, when, east of the Tamar, the powers of darkness still ruled over hordes of rude savages, the Cornish folk were already Christians and gentlemen, worshipping God in commodious chapels and at the feet of wayside crosses handsomely wrought of granite. The Danes destroyed the chapels long ago, but the

crosses remain for witness to this day. The people fared delicately on saffron cakes and pressed pilchards, and went daintily clad in precious stuffs. Their harbours from Looe to Marazion were thronged with the ships of foreign merchants, come from the ends of the earth to barter rare goods for tin; for in those happy days tin was more thought of than gold, and its price never fell; so Cornwall prospered as it has not prospered since. A wealthy land and a wonderful. By day men held peaceful possession and went about securely; but when night fell they hurried home-along and barred their doors. Then the giants came striding forth over the hills, halloaing to one another in voices of thunder. Some took their clubs and went to hunt wolves in the forests; others gathered on the downs and played hurling matches by the light of the moon. The piskies, too, were abroad in their thousands, running this way and that like rabbits in a croft. Ghostly lights twinkled on the hillsides, where the knockers, the spirits of dead miners, were streaming for phantom tin; and now and again a shrill squealing would be heard overhead, and a company of witches would sail across the moon, mounted on stalks of ragwort.

A wonderful land, and a blessed. In every seaward valley, by every holy spring, the saints from Eire had taken up their abode, and led peaceful lives of prayer and contemplation. For diversion they sat in their white robes on the black rocks, and fished in the blue sea for the red mullet and guckoo-fish. These, and succulent roots grown in the lewth of a carn, formed their nourishment. They had no cares, and if any one of them died before attaining his hundredth year, his brethren mourned for him as one cut off in his prime. The people loved and revered them, and brought them honey and saffron cakes on their name-days. And I make no question but that, if in those days and for long after, Cornwall was devout and prosperous beyond comparison with other nations, it was due in no small measure to the favour and intercession of these saints of hers. Little saints, you will say, of small influence, as obscure and outlandish as their own names. But an obscure saint whose interests are bounded by a single parish may, with diligence, accomplish more for it than would be possible for one of your great Archangels, whose affairs are world-wide, who is called on now from Spain and now from Russia, and his ears

deafened and confused with all the tongues of Babel. St. Veryan and St. Veep and St. Issey and the rest had no concerns, alive or dead, beyond the Tamar. No other speech than the soft Cornish brogue ascended to their ears ; and if they were obscure, they were also numerous, and hung together, you may be sure, in the good old Cornish fashion, uniting one and all when there were favours to confer or acts of vengeance to be done. And if petitions ascend to them no longer, and no sturdy Methodist in the Duchy does them lip-service, yet to this hour they are not altogether neglected. Their feast-days are still kept with tea and boughten cake ; maidens still visit their wells and drop in pins for propitiation, and still anxious mothers bring sickly children to bathe in the waters that were once touched by the lips of holiness. These things the good simple saints take note of, and smile and nod to one another, feeling sure that their time of busy service and intercession is on the way to return ; whether sooner or later, they humbly refrain from inquiring ; for they are lowly saints, without acknowledged worshippers, without estates, save a few barren acres of rock and moorland, and even to these their title is denied on earth ;

so their place is in the outer courts, where they sit, contented and hopeful, whispering together in the old forgotten tongue, and softly humming the old forgotten tunes.

Now of all the saints none lived in so sweet an odour of holiness, none was so loved and looked up to by all, as St. Lidgy of Pednmanack, the Monk's Headland. Some say he was the first of the saints to set foot on Cornish soil; certainly he was the oldest and wisest of them all. His years were a hundred and twenty; yet he walked without a staff, holding up his great white beard with both hands, lest he should stumble over it. Once a day he broke his fast. Every morning when he came to the door of his cell, there sat a dog-otter waiting. St. Lidgy would reflect for a moment, and would say—"I could fancy a morsel of ling to-day," or of pollack, or of guckoo-fish, as the case might be. Straightway the otter would wag its tail, trot down to the beach, and plunge into the sea; and before the saint could recite two paternosters, it had returned and laid a fine ling, or pollack, or whatever it was, at his feet. For not only men, but all the humble creatures of earth and air held St. Lidgy in reverence, nor had they any fear of him.

Even their poor simple wits could recognise the guileless candour of his looks and the tender loving-kindness of his frequent smile. All the birds and beasts of the valley loved him ; he could not stroll out of an evening but they thronged about him, leaping up to lick his hand, fanning his face with their wings. Indeed, their affectionate trustfulness was sometimes manifested in ways that might have caused annoyance to a less saintly character. But when, evening after evening, two greybirds perched on his shoulders and sang their loudest into his ears for an hour together, he never winced, but patiently listened, and thanked them courteously when they had done. Once a badger, driven from its hole by foxes, sought refuge in his cell and stayed there many days. Now the badger is a harmless beast of exemplary character, but it cannot be said to live in the odour of sanctity ; nor is its abode an agreeable resort for delicate nostrils. But the good St. Lidgy welcomed it cordially ; and since some relic of fleshly weakness deterred him from sharing his couch with the innocently malodorous creature, he vacated his cell without a murmur, and slept on the bare ground outside till the badger departed, cheered by a saintly benison.

Sometimes a neighbouring saint would visit St. Lidgy and hold pious discourse with him ; sometimes a fisherman, plagued with a whitlow or an evil conscience, would come to him for deliverance ; but mostly he dwelt alone with his beasts and birds ; for the valley of Pedn-manack was remote and difficult of access, as it is to this day. When he was alone he found it good, and good when he had company ; his content was absolute, without relation to circumstance.

Now one morning as he sat at the door of his cell, with his dear birds fluttering about him, he heard far up the valley a doleful roaring, and the tread of ponderous footsteps, and the clatter of stones dislodged in hasty flight. The robins and copper-finches flew up from his knees and shoulders, and sought refuge in the tamarisks, while the good saint turned eyes of tranquil curiosity in the direction of the sound. And he beheld a giant, such as frequented the land in those days, pelting full speed towards him, overleaping great rocks, blundering through close-set hedges, and ever and again looking over either shoulder and bellowing in an ecstasy of terror. He had no eyes for St. Lidgy, and was passing him un-

noticed, when, his foot slipping, he stumbled and fell prone at the saint's feet, where he lay panting and groaning. Now there was no love lost between the saints and the giants; for the giants, as is well known, were gods of old, and ruled the land till the saints came and ousted them; so they hated their supplanters, and often played them knavish tricks. Yet St. Lidgy was not discomposed; he did not even start from his seat, though the giant lay so near as to stir the skirts of his robe and the fringe of his beard with his heavy breathing. Only he lifted his eyebrows a little, and calmly took stock of the intruder.

It was a stout giant, to be sure; but do not be misled by foolish stories, and imagine that he was as tall as a church tower. Cornwall is proud of her giants, and justly so; but it is now many centuries since the last of them perished, and every year of those centuries has seen an inch or so added to their stature. Thus people have been imperceptibly led into lamentable exaggeration, and Cornish veracity has been hopelessly discredited in the eyes of strangers. The sober truth is that some twenty feet was the greatest stature the best-grown giants attained in their prime, and this one fell below

the limit by at least eighteen inches. Still, he was a stout giant. His arm was as thick as an ordinary man's body, and his gullet was capable of gulping a fat hen without chewing. He wore a coat of shaggy wolf-skins and breeches of the same ; he was as red-haired as a Dane and as ugly as sin.

Now St. Lidgy heard other footsteps approaching down the valley, and soon he could discern the figure of a man hurrying along, clad in white robes that fluttered voluminously about him. When he came nearer, St. Lidgy recognised a neighbouring saint, St. Widdock by name, and by repute a great bustler and as hot-tempered as a saint could be without forfeiting his title. What with wrath and the heat of pursuit, the holy man's face was as red as a turkey's ; he had lost one of his sandals, and his robe was torn and splashed in many places. In one hand he carried a holy-water stoup, in the other he brandished a whisk of griglans, or dried heather-stalks, such as the Papishers call an aspergil. When he caught sight of the prostrate giant he uttered a cry of mingled rage and triumph.

"Aha, thou rogue, I have 'e now ! *Nummy Dummy!*" he exclaimed, and dipped the whisk

in the stoup and flicked it in the giant's face. But in the hurry of the chase the holy water had been spilt; not a drop remained in the stoup. Perceiving this, St. Widdock stamped his foot, and addressing St. Lidgy, said hastily—

“*Pax tecum, soci*—peace be with thee, soce. Quick! fetch holy water; fetch it abundantly in a pail, and sprinkle me this rascal copiously, that he may shrivel and scriffie like a spider on a red-hot plate, the miscreant!”

“Peace be with thee also,” said St. Lidgy in his gentle voice, “and with all creatures living on earth, as was announced at Bethlehem. There is nothing more blessed than peace; let no deed of violence disturb it.”

The mild rebuke penetrated St. Widdock's anger, but did not soothe it; rather did it prick and provoke him.

“What!” he cried. “Peace to wicked knaves also?—to the destroyers of peace, the foes of saints and good men? Is this sound doctrine, brother? I trow not. This is a world of evil; it behoves us to exercise judgment and consider expediency in the interpretation of heavenly messages, lest we perish. It were blasphemous, and exceedingly unpractical to boot, to extend the blessing of

Bethlehem to turbulent rebels. Peace? What manner of peace is that which imperils the personal safety of the saints? And how shall there be peace till our foes are rooted out?"

St. Widdock's voice was loud because of his anger, and of his impatience with St. Lidgy's casuistical scrupulosity. At the sound of it the giant stirred from his swoon and lifted his head, staring stupidly about him; and perceiving the two saints, one on either side of him, he roared affrightedly, his fat sides quivering.

"Ay, roar away, thou varmen!" cried St. Widdock exultantly. "Thou'rt caught this time, and no mistake! Listen!" he continued to St. Lidgy. "This morning I rose at day-break, and after the prescribed orisons, took lines and hooks and went down to the cove to fish, bearing in mind the example of the holy Apostles, after which we are enjoined to order our lives. Also I was hungry, having fasted yesterday on a handful of watercress and a goose-egg, which egg was offensively stale. My malison on her who laid it. I searched the shore for limpets, and baited my hook therewith, and took my seat on a rock and dropped my lines in the water, reciting a prayer meanwhile. And the fish swam up,

jostling one another in their eagerness to take the bait ; for they are a pious folk, and since it is their appointed destiny to be cooked and eaten, they desire nothing better than to make a saintly end, accounting it the greatest of honours to be allowed to contribute to the nourishment of holiness. Soon six fine mullet lay across my knees, strung on a withy. I put up my line, and sat considering their plumpness and gay colour, admiring how curiously they gaped and quivered in the sun, as the convoys of lost souls quiver and pant at the first whiff of the fiery furnace. And as I sat thus profitably meditating, suddenly a huge great stone whizzed past my head and fell into the sea before me, splashing me from head to foot. At this I sprang up, and my fish, my excellent, plump, and tasty fish, slipped from my lap into the water. And looking behind me, I beheld this hideous monster, this outrageous, overgrown ruffian, geeking and grizzling upon me from behind a rock. Great was my anger. Straightway I advanced upon him, remembering David, how he went forth against Goliath, and reciting the formula of exorcism in a loud voice. When he heard the sound of the blessed Latin he turned tail and

fled, I after him. Passing my cell, I paused and snatched up stoup and aspergil, and thus armed continued the pursuit. A weary dance the pestilent knave has led me, over hedges and ditches and gaps and stiles, through brambles and pools and clodgy fields. I am lagged with mud, my robe is squarded to flatters, but I have catched the rogue at last. And now, brother, fetch the holy water, that this lumbering lump of iniquity may learn what it is to practise impiety and chuck stones at peaceful saints."

At this the giant rolled over and sat up, clenching his great fists and blubbering profusely.

"Aw, don't 'e!" he cried to St. Lidgy in his broad native dialect. "Don't 'e, maister! I dedn' mane no harm. I thoft 'a was a g'eath gull, setten theer 'pon the rocks. 'T'es the truth I'm a-tellen of—a g'eath white gull I thoft 'a was. 'My nerves!' says I, 'what a tremenyous big gull to be sure! I'll 'eave a bully to en—send en flop in the say; 'a 'll be grand to 'ear en squawk,' says I to myself. 'T'es the truth, maister. I dedn' mane no 'arm by the gen'leman. I awnly thoft to 'ave a bit o' fun weth the gull. That's what I said: 'Sech a tremenyous big gull I never be'old. I'll 'ave a bit o' fun wed 'n, b'lieve,' said I."

"Gull indeed! Do I look like a gull?" exclaimed St. Widdock, spreading his arms abroad, so that his robes waved about him like a pair of great snowy wings. "Do I look like a gull?" he repeated, thrusting his face with its hooked nose and black beady eyes into the face of the giant. "Gull! I'll teach thee, thou squinny-eyed rogue!" he bawled, fairly dancing with rage.

Now, wise as St. Lidgy was, and deeply versed in matters of religion, in human affairs he was a very babe. He was utterly without knowledge or comprehension of anger, falsehood, and uncharitableness; so that the world was a sealed book to him, and the ways of men were like a stage-play acted in a foreign tongue—a guise-dance of antic mouthings and meaningless gestures. Bewildered and distressed, he laid a hand on St. Widdock's arm.

"Brother," he said, "what is this? Art mazed, I think. Thou hast suffered no harm, and this other has done and meant none. Has he not declared it? Where is thy complaint, then?"

"Complaint!" echoed St. Widdock furiously. "Where are my mullet?—tell me that. And my sandal? Is it meet for a saint to go half-shod? And what of the fright I got when

the stone whizzed passed my head? Are these things of no account? Were I as other folk, 'twould pass; for the natural and unregenerate man within me is humble and meek, eager to turn the cheek to the smiter. But my saintship is grievously offended; it brooks no affront or insult to one of the elect, be it myself or another. Fetch then the holy water, brother; and if thou art plagued with morbid scruples, leave the sprinkling to me. A rare sight I can promise thee. As the first drop touches the villain, his cheeks shall fall in and his joints give way. At the second drop, the great body of him shall begin to shake and dissolve, like a lump of salt in a stew-pot. When the third has fallen, 'Where is he?' thou'lt cry, perceiving naught but a heap of wolf-skins on the ground. And then something will stir under the skins, and a miserable, puny, wizened pisky shall stick its head out of the heap, like a rat out of a mixen, and geek this way and that in a maze, and screech like a whitneck, and scuttle off to hide itself in a rabbit hole, the varmen!"

And St. Widdock laughed loudly, well pleased to see how the rogue of a giant shivered and cowered at his words. But St. Lidgy's

bewilderment increased, and his distress was painful to behold ; surely the Fiend had entered into him and was subtly poisoning his heart against his brother saint. For St. Widdock's pious exultation found no echo in his breast ; rather did it unaccountably disgust him. He gazed about as in a dream. High overhead sang a happy lark ; in the bushes the small birds had recovered from their fright, and were twittering peacefully ; out seawards the gentle waves fell with a loving murmur on the white-bosomed shore ; and the good warm sun, fixed, silent, imperturbably benevolent, watched over all. And looking back to where the hulking monster writhed and moaned, while the wrathful saint stood over him, eyeing him as a raven eyes a sick horse, St. Lidgy sighed deeply.

"Brother," he said timidly, "it were well to reprove this giant with words of loving admonition, and let him depart in peace."

"Brother," exclaimed St. Widdock testily, "it were well to do no such thing. I wonder at thee. Where is thy zeal ? Where thy detestation of iniquity ? Art thou one of those who perversely exalt Mercy, that feeble, doddering, knock-kneed beatitude, over Justice, the

comely and inflexible? Fie upon thee! A sorry saint I deem thee, and no bustler in the cause of virtue."

Now some inkling of the situation began to penetrate the giant's bedazzled brain, and a flicker of hope sprang up in his heart. He crawled closer to St. Lidgy, and clasped his knees, dumbly imploring mercy. The clear grey eyes of the saint looked into the bleared, blinking eyes of the giant, and a fellowship was established between them.

"Brother," said St. Lidgy firmly, "I have looked into this poor creature's eyes, and I perceive no evil in them. Moreover, he claims my protection; I cannot suffer evil to befall him. Put off thy anger, then, and clothe thyself in forgiveness. Accord him the kiss of peace, and depart if thou wilt, or if thou wilt, stay."

But at this St. Widdock only drew his garment of wrath in closer folds about him.

"What!" he cried. "Give him the kiss of peace, sayst? Set my sanctified lips on the face of this anointed limb? Pah! My stomach turneth at the thought, and since all the bodily organs of the saints are in mysterious correspondence with their souls, I am warned thereby of sore spiritual peril."

"Is there peril, then?" asked St. Lidgy.

"Surely," replied the other. "Grievous peril. Who can remain undefiled, touching pitch? How should lips, sullied by such unholy contact, frame themselves to pious discourse? What prayer could achieve the passage of a barrier so befouled? The croak of toads were more melodious than the hymn issuing therefrom. And what purification, short of purgatorial fire, and that the hottest, would suffice to remove the clogging pollution, and enable one to utter the password at the celestial gate without a self-accusing stammer? Moreover—why, what are 'e at, brother?"

He broke off abruptly in great amazement; for as he spoke, St. Lidgy stooped over the giant and tenderly kissed his forehead, saying softly—

"If this be sin, no saint am I."

Like a stone stood St. Widdock, till, his amazement abating a little, he cast his eyes upwards, in expectation of a token of wrath. But none came—not so much as a distant thunder-peal. Much disturbed, he began to edge away, muttering to himself. Here was a matter beyond his wits, a wanton foolishness without precedent or parallel, inexplicable, portentously subversive of rigid doctrine. It

was borne upon him that his place was elsewhere, and suddenly he turned, tucked his robes about him, and departed quickly.

Then St. Lidgy turned to the giant, blessed him, and bade him depart in peace. But the giant hugged his knees more closely, and earnestly begged to be allowed to remain, unfolding in rude stammering phrases his fear of St. Widdock, and the admiration and affection he had conceived for St. Lidgy, because of his kindly eyes and goodly beard. Nor did the saint reject his petition.

"Stay if thou wilt, my son," he said. "The earth is the Lord's. Who am I, that I should order another's goings upon it?"

At this the giant arose and shouted joyfully, and leapt about, cutting uncouth capers, cracking his heels together, and snapping his clumsy fingers; and St. Lidgy laughed aloud at his antics. In those days merriment was permitted to the saints, and a sour face was not considered essential to holiness; rather was it regarded as a badge of obscure sin.

So it came about that these two, the saint and the giant, dwelt together in the valley of Pednmanack; and a wonderful affection sprang

up between them. Both were simple and without guile, so that their love was such as the troubled hearts of worldly men are incapable of entertaining. Waking and sleeping they were never parted, but abode side by side in perfect amity. At times it was the giant's delight to entertain his master with feats of strength. Taking him by the robe, he would lead him up to a great rock, as big as a house, and, setting his hand upon it, would say—

“Look, uncle ; do 'e think I could snatch up thicky g'eat stone and heave en auver clift ? ”

St. Lidgy's eyes would twinkle, and he would feign unbelief, saying—

“Nay, my son ; 'tis surely too much even for thy great strength.”

“Stand aside, uncle, and I'll show 'e,” the giant would say ; and stepping up to the rock, he would grip it in his great arms, heave it above his head, run with it to the edge of the cliff, and toss it far out to sea, laughing uproariously at the splash it made, and then turning quickly to enjoy St. Lidgy's cries and gestures of astonishment, which were duly forthcoming, even to the fiftieth time of repetition.

Or he would take other rocks, and pile them one upon another to a great height, as children

pile their wooden bricks. Some of the heaps and pillars he made are still standing on the sand of St. Lidgy's Cove and on the cliffs about. Strangers come and stare at them every summer, and argue how they came there. Some think them the work of the Druids, some of the Danes, others of King Arthur's merry men, others again of old Tregagle himself; but the country people call them by their right names—The Giant's Carn, The Giant's Staircase, and so on.

But the giant's dearest privilege was to be allowed to hoist St. Lidgy on his shoulder and take him for a jaunt up country. It was a strange sight to see them, the giant galloping along, taking the hedges at a stride, halloaing and brandishing his great staff, and the saint perched up aloft, steadying himself with a firm grasp in the red tangle of the giant's hair, a broad smile of enjoyment on his wrinkled old face, and his long white beard streaming behind in the wind.

At other times, when St. Lidgy was disposed for meditation, the giant would stretch himself at his feet and watch him as he sat stroking his beard or revolving his thumbs one about the other. By the hour the giant would lie

thus in careful silence, never stirring unless to wave a warning hand to the birds or beasts of the valley when they came too near.

Such was the manner of their life for many months. Then, one evening, as St. Lidgy sat meditating, absorbed in a celestial vision, his eyes chanced to rest on the giant, and the image they received passed into his brain and mingled with the vision. A thought came to him, and he said to himself—

“What an excellent figure this stout fellow would cut in the heavenly courts! What diversion he would afford the angelic hosts with his mighty stature and his simple sayings! And his great strength would be welcome there, whether for the rolling of rocks down upon the assailing armies of fiends, or for the erection of new mansions for the blessed.”

Thus he mused, Heaven appearing to him in the likeness of a royal city, set on a fortified hill and thronged with warriors and bards, where God held His court after the fashion of the Kings of Eire, warring and feasting by turns throughout eternity, now buckling on His armour and sallying forth against the beleaguering fiends, and anon returning to sit in hall with His hosts about Him, drinking mead,

listening to harpers, laughing at jesters, and solacing His sight with the tricks and parading of dwarfs and giants and tumblers.

Considering further, he said—

“Surely my good Lord would welcome and reward me if I came before Him leading this lusty recruit. For this reason, maybe, he was sent, that I might instruct and prepare him.”

So he called the giant, and began to expound to him the mysteries of the faith. And the giant listened and made earnest efforts to comprehend, pursing his lips, wrinkling his brow, and holding his breath until his face grew purple and beaded all over with sweat. But it was all in vain; the simplest point of doctrine was too subtle for his gross wits to grasp, nor could he by any effort encompass the art of linking thought with thought in a goodly chain of reasoning. Yet St. Lidgy did not despair, but continued his instruction day by day, varying the method and the illustrations with infinite ingenuity, sounding and groping in this morass of ignorance after a single spot of firm ground whereon to raise the fair edifice of faith. But though the giant continued to listen respectfully, admiring the stream of fine-sounding words, how copiously it flowed, and

never tired of watching his master's venerable beard as it wagged under the stress of his eloquence, yet he was wise in his foolishness, and made no further attempt to understand.

Perceiving this, St. Lidgy was greatly discouraged and distressed, doubting his Lord's intentions with regard to the giant. Yet he could not believe that a soul so gentle and guileless was doomed to destruction. And pondering on the matter, he perceived his error, and abased himself.

"What manner of saint am I," he cried, "thus to doubt and dogmatise? Is not this a sign from my dear Lord of the small store He sets by learned doctrines? Cannot I hear Him say: 'Give over. There be saints and doctors enough in My courts; My ears are sated with crudition. The enemy batters at My gates; I call for stout fighting men; would you bring Me yet another subtle debater?'"

So St. Lidgy resolved to relinquish the attempt to instruct the giant in matters that were beyond him. Instead, that he might not remain altogether devoid of orthodox knowledge, he told him tales of the strong men of olden time—of Jacob who wrestled with the angel, of Saul, who was chosen king because

of his tall stature, and of Samson, who carried off the city gates and pulled the temple down. Only of Goliath destroyed by David he made no mention, lest the tale should distress his friend. To these stories the giant listened with great eagerness and unwearied delight; and St. Lidgy rejoiced, regarding this eagerness as a certain sign of unfolding grace.

Then he debated whether he might venture to baptize the giant, but held back, doubting if the time had yet come. This chiefly deterred him, that the giant's thick, unready tongue stumbled at the Holy Names, and his lips failed in their stammering attempts at prayer and confession of faith. By this St. Lidgy clearly perceived that the harvest was not yet ripe.

"In God's good time," said St. Lidgy, and awaited a token.

Now the blessed Easter season drew near. And on Easter morning St. Lidgy left his cell at daybreak, the giant at his heels, and climbed Pednmanack Cliff, and knelt in prayer at the summit, his face to the east. And as the sun rose dancing out of the sea, he lifted his arms and cried in a solemn ecstasy—

"God is good. Praise God."

Scarcely had he spoken when he fell a-

trembling at the sound of a voice behind him, repeating—

“God is good. Praise God.”

He looked about, fearing lest another should be there. But there was none but the giant, and he was kneeling and spreading his arms abroad in imitation of his master.

“What saidst thou, my son?” asked St. Lidgy in a shaking voice.

“God is good, uncle. Praise God, uncle,” replied the giant, with a grin of bashful pride on his homely face.

Then St. Lidgy arose and embraced the giant with laughter and tears, and the two went down into the valley and knelt by the holy well, and there St. Lidgy baptized the giant by the name of Simplicius.

After this the two lived together in great happiness, glorifying God daily. Nor did St. Lidgy again attempt to instruct Simplicius, or to ornament his unique and candid robe of faith with the exquisite and elaborate embroidery of fine-spun doctrine. “God is good,” said Simplicius perpetually; and when he added “Praise God,” his creed was complete. And the master humbled himself before the pupil, recognising the vanity of wit and the futility of

learning. He solemnly renounced his wisdom, and refrained thenceforth from all speculations, questionings, ponderings, and profundities, perceiving them in their true light as superfluous baggage, weighty hindrances to the upward flight of the soul. Watching his birds one day, he made a parable, thus—

“As for the gulls and ravens, so for the spirit of man. It needs but two wings to carry it to heaven; and the name of the right wing is, *God is good*, and of the left, *Praise God*. To these will I trust. If they are enough for a stout giant, surely they will suffice to support me also, who am short and lean and small in the bone.”

So daily the two made their orisons in the following manner. St. Lidgy would begin by saying “God is good.” Then, “Praise God,” Simplicius would answer in a flash. “Praise God,” St. Lidgy would repeat, catching him up. And finally Simplicius wound round off the antiphony smartly with “God is good.”

The years passed, and St. Lidgy grew very feeble. At last he was aware of his approaching death, and rejoiced thereat. Calling Simplicius to him, he bade him farewell, enjoining him to wait patiently in the continual exercise of a tranquil piety until his own end should come.

“And be assured, my son,” he said, “that with my good Lord’s permission I shall wait day and night by the gates, that I may be the first to welcome thee and guide thee, who art unused to cities, to the mansion that is already a-building for thee. ’Tis a goodly mansion; tall as thou art, thou wilt not need to stoop at the entrance.”

Then he blessed Simplicius, and his spirit departed quietly. And Simplicius wept over his master’s body, and dug a hole in the ground, and laid the body within, and set a great rock over the hole, and sat sadly considering what he should do now that he was alone. He had no desire to live, yet life was strong within him; no circumstance of mortal existence is so melancholy and irksome.

Now admire the subtle and unexpected workings of Providence. For as Simplicius sat grieving, St. Widdock watched him from above, cautiously peeping from behind a rock. To each of the saints was allotted some supernatural gift or quality; the portion of St. Widdock was the instant and miraculous cognisance of death or disaster in the ranks of the faithful; no raven had a surer scent for carrion than he. Scarcely had St. Lidgy given up the ghost

when the event was already known to him. He laughed to think that the giant, his ancient adversary, was now alone without saintly protection; and girding his robes about him he made all haste towards Pednmanack. There he saw Simplicius sitting alone; of the body of St. Lidgy he saw no sign, for Simplicius had already buried it. Filled with holy anger, he returned and went out into the towns and villages, proclaiming the woful fate of St. Lidgy, sacrilegiously killed and eaten by an ungodly giant. With words of fire he stirred the people up to vengeance; a multitude assembled and followed him to Pednmanack, and set upon Simplicius and overwhelmed him with stones and arrows. They dragged his dead body down to the shore, and the tide came and carried it out to the sea.

For many years the story was told at firesides. Men revered the memory of St. Lidgy, Martyr, and of St. Widdock, that most zealous of saints militant; but the memory of the cannibal giant was universally execrated. At this the gentle reader may grieve: surely without reason, unless he believes that their fame on earth is a matter of consequence or solicitude to the happy dead.

TRAM TRIST

“For the elements were changed in themselves by a kind of harmony, like as in a psaltery notes change the name of the tune, and yet are always sounds ; which may well be perceived by the sight of the things that have been done.”

The Wisdom of Solomon.

JUMPING out of bed and huddling on his shirt and breeches, Tram Trist tucked his fiddle under his arm, stumbled down the cottage stairs, and hurried, bare-headed and bare-foot, through the fever-stricken village, lying deathly still under the cruel sun. Up the white empty road he went, now talking aloud to himself, now laughing at the gambols of the tiny leopards, no bigger than mice, that ran before him like a flock of sheep, now giving a hasty good-day to the groups of little black-coated men, thumb-high, who stood gossiping by the wayside, doffing their beavers to one another with exaggerated courtesy, or waving diminutive sticks and umbrellas in the heat of shrill argument. He would have dearly liked to stop and chat

with the manikins, but there was no time to lose; his flock must be herded in the wood while the sun was still high, while the shadows were still strong and sharp enough to fence them about securely.

He drove the flock through a gate into a field. Here they scattered, and he ran this way and that, collecting them. His clumsy foot trod on one of the gay-striped little creatures and crushed it; the blood spirted, staining the grass. Tram Trist sat down to weep at leisure. When he looked about him again, the sun was already declining, and his fantastical flock sat about him in a half circle, their green eyes upon him. They had grown by now to the size of kittens. One stretched itself, advanced, sniffed at his bloodstained foot, and snarled, arching its back.

"Come up!" cried Tram Trist, and drove them against the sun, until they came to where the shadows of the wood lay in cool intricacy upon the grass. Here they halted and huddled together.

"Hoo!" shouted Tram Trist; and they bounded high in air, leaping the wattled shadows, skipping from patch to patch of sunlight. They pressed into the wood through a

narrow sunny gap, and as soon as the last straggler was within, Tram Trist lay down across the opening, so that his shadow barred it from side to side. For awhile he watched them as they prowled and sported, swelling bigger and bigger every moment, and becoming less and less substantial as they grew, until they were presently lost to sight in the mingled shade and glitter of the place.

The fever died down in Tram Trist's veins. He stretched himself at languid length and peered idly into the depths of the wood. That wood is of small extent, but infinitely deep. As you take your way across it, veil after veil is withdrawn, but ever another remains to shroud the mystery that retreats before you. The sun possessed the wood, inlaying the holly leaves with quicksilver, kindling the laurel bushes into harmless white fire, weaving delicate flame-patterns over the ground, touching here and there an ash-trunk with astonishment. Troops of small shadows, small brightnesses innumerable, an infinite store of jewelled toys, a perpetual flicker, a multitude of little rustling sounds—through all this the ash-trunks rose, grey and silent.

The undergrowth crackled; out of it came

a great black pig, and stopped at the sight of Tram Trist lying there. It stared at him fixedly with its keen little eyes; and as it stared a haze came over his senses. The glittering wood swam, span, and vanished, and utter oblivion possessed him. . . .

He existed; he was conscious of himself; but beyond himself was nothing—no light, no sound, no world of things to touch. . . .

Out of the darkness began a slow feeble beating—not at first a sound, but like the throbbing in the temples of a runner, which is felt rather than heard. Gradually it quickened and grew audible with a sound that resembled the tapping of a drummer summoning an assembly. Quicker it went, and quicker, till the beat of it was lost in a deep hum—like the sound of the pedal-note that shakes the church windows, says Tram Trist, or not unlike the purring of a night hawk, but far deeper. At the same time it began to throb within itself with a doubtful rhythm, and Tram Trist was conscious of a cloudy something that gathered about the throbbing in the darkness. Then the sound divided itself, in a way that he is accustomed to illustrate on his fiddle, playing a D in unison on the two lower strings,

and gradually drawing a finger up the second of them till A is sounding over D. So, he says, the hum divided, part remaining fixed, while part went whirring up the scale to that lamentable empty fifth. Then he was filled with a sense of dread and expectation, while dark shapes whirled about him. Faster they whirled, without order or purpose, and still that deep divided tone jigged and droned in his ear, as it has continued to jig and drone to this day.

Then—after numberless centuries, it seemed—he was aware of another sound welling up out of the vacant depths, a sound that twined about “like a melody without any tune to it, if you understand,” says he. It was infinitely sweet and stirring, and with it came a faint light of early dawn. Now the dark shapes took colour and condensed, moving slower and slower till they stopped and settled, while the new sound steadied itself to the rhythm of the abyss, which had now grown busy and assured. Soon Tram Trist could recognise the shapes, though they were not yet solid, but wavered like things seen through a fog. It was a forest that gathered about him—a forest of dim trees that seemed to reach the sky. And now other sounds twined

up from the depths, till there was a host of them soaring, circling, crossing, like gulls over a roaring beach. Tram Trist is wont to explain confusedly how he not only heard the sounds, but saw them; or rather that each sound was in some way threaded into the being of some one of the things he saw—the swaying trees, and the heavy-moving beasts, and the gay birds that hopped overhead, and the hairy half-human creatures that ran crouching along the ground. And when the sunlight began to penetrate the mist, it came upon him like the sound of a trumpet.

The light swelled to a shattering fanfare; the mist was rent, shredded, and tossed away. He was still among trees, but now he knew them for those under which he had fallen asleep. And the dear familiar birds, his brother musicians, were all about him: blackbird, greybird, bushsparrow, copperfinch and robin, trilling, fluting, twittering, charming the young leaves out of their sheaths, enticing the flowers to unfold, speeding the world along. Little red mice ran in and out among the green grass, chippering musically as they went. The grass-tops swayed over them, making a kind of silent music too.

Folk passed in the wood, and not one of them but tarried to make music. A maid sang as she plucked a nosegay; a huntsman paused to wind his horn; an old beggar-man leaned on his stick and piped a weak stave; a woodman bawled a rude ditty as he laid his axe to the roots of a tree; a woman put her child to rest on a bed of fallen leaves and sang a lullaby over it. There was no pause in the music; when no folk were there to sing, the birds were whistling and the bees humming, and the trees were vocal in the wind. The thread of melody was unbroken; it had begun with the world; if it should end, the world would surely come to an end too, like an unfinished song. The world was made to a tune, and to a tune it went.

Tram Trist leapt to his feet and stood wide awake in the wood. His head swam; the blood in his veins sang thinly to the beating of his heart. Awed and triumphant, he repeated aloud: "The world—the world do go to a tune."

He hurried away, all afire to tell the world its own great unsuspected secret. The world heard it calmly, lifting its eyebrows. The world has been revealed to itself so many times, in

so many shapes, by saints, philosophers, and madmen, that it has grown incredulous of new gospels. A crazy vagabond fiddler must rest content with a patient hearing and a tolerant shrug of the shoulders. Still here was pretty doctrine. *The world was made to a tune; here stands one who heard it a-making; and more by token, the tune went thus and thus. The world do go to a tune, now sad, now gay; sing, neighbours, and speed the world along.* Pretty, foolish doctrine, to be sure. Nobody discouraged him, and that was enough for Tram Trist. He was none of your fiery propagandists, such as are bred of harsher creeds. This little shambling, shock-haired, soft-eyed prophet was content with proclaiming his news to any that would listen, adding no other argument than his own example.

He is old and bent now; he goes in rags and cadges for crusts and stray pilchards; but his fingers are still cunning on the strings, and when he plays people are stirred with memories of matters that were forgotten before their grandfathers were born. He plays only the tunes he heard in the wood that day; there are no such moving tunes nowadays, says he. He has grown very deaf of late, and the world

is mostly a silent show to him, except when he plays. But he is always playing—fiddling, or singing and humming. Those two deep notes still throb and drone in his head night and day, and if you seem interested he will try to explain to you the intolerable feeling of desolation with which that hollow, empty sound affects him. He dreads to be left alone with it for a moment, and moreover his fear is not only for himself. He is bound to go on humming and scraping lest the world should return to chaos; for the birds stopped singing a year ago, after his last illness, and now there is no music left to keep things rolling, save what is made by him—Tristram Trist, old Tram the Fiddler of Lantrestyn in Lyonesse, son of Tram Trist the Crowder, whose forefathers were musicians and bards right back to the old ancient times of King Arthur himself.

The village folk humour him and do their best to hearten him up. Young fishermen newly home from Plymouth come and bawl the latest music-hall ditty in his ear, that he may know that the divine spirit of song is still abroad in the land. Or when the Army shouts salvation in the street of a Sunday morning, they entice him to take his stand between the cornet and

the big drum, and watch his face for an acknowledgment that here is melody powerful enough to keep a whole galaxy of worlds spinning for centuries. But he only shakes his old head grimly.

"*That* won't save 'e," says he, and hurries home to his fiddle. For an awful responsibility—that of Atlas, no less—rests on his bowed shoulders. His meals are snatched in haste; he dares not sleep, he tells you; and however that may be, it is certain that at whatever hour of the night you pass his door, you are pretty certain to see a light in the window and to hear within that feeble quavering and scraping which alone keeps this great universe from crumbling into ruin.

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